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THURSDAY FEBRUARY 26 1998

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Good Will Hunting

TOKEN 4 AND DETAILS PAGE 37



Jason Cowley on the misfortunes of the Manchester Five

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2 SECTIONS

Minister faces standards inquiry

Directorship not disclosed by Robinson

By Chris Ayres

Geoffrey Robinson faces a Commons inquiry after failing to declare a lucrative directorship in the register of members' interests for at least three years.

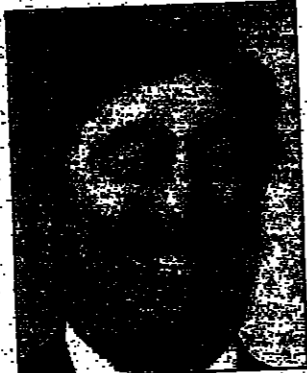
Documents show that the multi-millionaire Paymaster General was chairman of a British machine tools company from 1983 to 1995. However, he did not register his position at the company — which paid him a salary ranging from £17,000 to £51,000 — until 1987.

David Heathcoat-Amory, the Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, has written to the Parliamentary watchdog Sir Gordon Downey, asking him to investigate the matter. Sources close to Sir Gordon have confirmed that a report will be produced on the case, but say it is unlikely that action will be taken for a breach of rules so long ago.

If Sir Gordon were to act, Mr Robinson could face being suspended from Parliament and having to apologise to the House — as the Labour MP Robert Wareing had to do last year. Several Conservatives, including Sir Andrew Bowden and Tim Smith, have also been rebuked for failing to disclose outside interests.

A similar verdict on Mr Robinson, who has already caused the Government embarrassment over his links with an offshore trust, would almost certainly result in his resignation.

The discovery of the offshore trust, which holds millions pounds worth of shares



Robinson: Tories want inquiry by watchdog

in the TransTec engineering company founded by Mr Robinson, came shortly after the Government said it would crack down on tax avoidance. Although Sir Gordon cleared him of breaching House of Commons rules, he was criticised for not registering the trust or for seeking advice from the watchdog on whether he should do.

In the latest charge against the Paymaster General, Mr Heathcoat-Amory has pointed out to Sir Gordon that Mr Robinson failed to disclose his paid directorship of Agie — originally called Jigwade, then Swiss EDM — although he registered two unpaid directorships.

The letter says: "Omissions and failures to register by Conservative Party members were treated as very serious matters, incurring disciplinary action in the last Parliament. I would be most grateful for your views and what action you will recommend in the

case of Mr Geoffrey Robinson."

The 1984 Register of Members' Interests clearly says that one of the nine criteria for MPs having to declare their interests is if they hold remunerated directorships of companies, public or private. It goes on to say: "It is the responsibility of members to notify changes in their registrable interests, within four weeks."

Mr Robinson refused to respond personally to faxes and telephone calls from The Times yesterday. When asked why he had failed to declare his paid directorships of Jigwade, Swiss EDM and Agie between 1982 and 1987, his spokesman said: "This is another pathetic attempt to smear Geoffrey Robinson. He has registered his interests and clearly has nothing to hide."

However, further questions have also been raised about Mr Robinson's methods of declaring his financial interests in company accounts. In 1983, he declared in Swiss EDM's financial report that he was also a director of Transfer Technology, but did not mention that he was also a director of West Midlands Enterprise Board — a directorship he declared in Transfer Technology's accounts. His declarations to Parliament for the same year are entirely different, listing directorships of Triumph Motorcycles and a company called Mercia Sound.

Leading article, page 21



This tiger killed its zookeeper; another mauled a circus worker yesterday. Experts say that no big cat can ever be considered tame or safe

Tiger mauls Chipperfield worker

By Helen Johnstone and Nick Nuttall

A CHIPPERFIELD Circus worker's arm was bitten off and eaten by a tiger at the family's winter quarters in Oxfordshire last night.

The 32-year-old man, who has not been named, had been feeding the Bengal tiger from outside the cage when the animal lunged for his arm and severed it just below the elbow. He was helped to safety by police and paramedics before being flown to the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford.

The accident happened inside a compound at the circus's winter quarters at Heythrop, Chipping Norton, near the Chipperfield family home. It is understood that the worker, who had

been with the company for only a couple of weeks, had departed from normal procedure where staff use a long stick to put food into cages, and instead put his arm inside.

Chris Hurley, a paramedic who treated him at the scene, said that he had lost a good deal of blood and was in great pain, but was fully conscious and in remarkably good spirits as he was given oxygen and painkillers. "He was very brave and talking to us all the time." He was also reported to be totally relaxed as he was wheeled into surgery. A hospital orderly said: "We asked him if he was allergic to anything and he smiled and replied 'Anything'."

A spokesman for Chipperfield Enterprises said later: "Our family has bred

tigers for 15 years and up until January this year we have never before had any kind of serious moment with a tiger. Now two have occurred in two months. We are heartbroken."

He was referring to the incident in Florida last month when Richard Chipperfield was mauled by a tiger he had raised from a cub. Mr Chipperfield, 24, had been posing for photographs with his brother Graham and 12 tigers when he put his head near the animal's mouth. The tiger clamped his jaws shut until Graham Chipperfield and an assistant prised them open with a fire extinguisher.

The Chipperfield family has generally been spared from maulings by the big cats it has used in its circuses for 300 years, but animal experts insisted

last night that there was no such thing as a tamed tiger. Years of handling and human contact can be overruled in an instant by natural instincts that are too deeply ingrained ever to be lost.

Tricia Hodson, manager of the Born Free Foundation's big cat programme, said: "You can never breed out or sublimate a tiger's basic instincts. It is a solitary, predatory, animal. These behaviours will always be lurking beneath the surface."

The foundation recently rescued eight tigers from a circus in Italy and found that their wild instincts re-emerged within weeks. "The animals may have appeared subdued to the people who fed them. But when they turned their backs the animals were up to the bars in the hunting position."

Labour support slips again

The public is becoming more dissatisfied with the Government but there are few signs yet of any sustained recovery in support for the Tories, according to the latest MORI poll for The Times.

Labour has slipped slightly for the fourth successive month, to 52 per cent, with the Tories on 28 per cent. Page 12

Extra benefits

Gordon Brown has bowed to backbench pressure on one-parent benefit cuts and agreed to extra cash payments for all families to help with childcare costs. Page 2

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Princess Margaret flying back to London today

By Alan Hamilton

PRINCESS MARGARET was last night preparing to fly home from the Caribbean as Buckingham Palace reported that she was making steady progress after suffering a slight stroke on Monday evening.

The 67-year-old Princess was expected to arrive at Gatwick shortly before 7 am today on a British Airways scheduled flight from Bridgetown, Barbados, where she has spent 24 hours under observation in a local hospital. Palace sources said that doctors at the Bayview Hospital in Bridgetown, acting in consultation with Dr Richard Thompson, the Queen's physician in London, had decided she had recovered sufficiently to make the seven-hour flight. Yesterday the Queen, visiting a primary school at

Crouch End, North London, told pupils that she was "very relieved" at her younger sister's recovery. "She is feeling very much better now, thank you," the Queen said in response to one pupil's inquiry. Jill Bierschenk, head teacher at St Aidan's primary school, which the Queen was reopening after a disastrous fire, said: "I really admire the Queen for keeping her engagement with us today, considering the circumstances."

Princess Margaret suffered her stroke while dining with friends near her holiday home on Mustique. Dr Michael Bunbury, the island's only doctor, was called when she complained of dizziness, chest pains and a severe headache. Although she was able to walk home after being examined in his surgery, she was

flown by air ambulance on Tuesday to the nearest big hospital, in Barbados, for tests and observation. She was able to walk on and off the aircraft without apparent difficulty.

Dr Bunbury reported that the stroke had been slight, and that she had suffered no paralysis or slurring of speech. He praised her bravery. "She was terribly controlled. She just kept so calm. She is an intelligent woman and she knew what was happening to her, but there was no panic or fear or anything."

When the Princess arrives back in London she goes to the King Edward VII Hospital for Officers in St Marylebone for examination by her own physicians led by Dr Thompson.

Dr Shuttford, page 18

Voluntary code for ramblers likely

By Jill Sherman and Michael Hornsby

TONY BLAIR was last night accused of caving in to country landowners after he declared his support for a voluntary deal to give people access to acres of moorland, mountains and heathland.

Mr Blair in effect ditched Labour's longstanding right-to-roam policy in what was seen as a pre-emptive strike before the countryside protest march on Sunday. More than 250,000 people are expected to converge on London to protest against government plans to ban fox-hunting and give the public access to their land.

William Hague, the leader of the Opposition, and other Tories are expected to take part in Sunday's march. The only known government involvement will be the presence of Lord Donoughue, a junior Agriculture Minister, at a pre-

march breakfast. Mr Blair says that rural difficulties "should not be hijacked for political opportunism". Yesterday he told MPs that while there would always be the threat of legislation, he preferred the voluntary option where landowners would agree to open up parts of their estates on a phased timetable. Landowners would decide when and which parts of their land they would open to the public.

The consultation paper published by Michael Meacher outlines the voluntary option but also makes clear that legislation would be introduced if this fails.

Downing Street sources said that if legislation was needed it could not be done for at least two years.

Right to roam, page 7

Camelot ordered to act on child gambling addicts

By Damian Whitworth and Joanna Bale

THE lottery regulator will today demand that Camelot clamp down on illegal scratchcard sales as new research shows that children are becoming gambling addicts, with 2 per cent of 12 to 15-year-olds becoming anti-social or turning to crime to support their habit.

John Stoker, the acting Director-General of the National Lottery, will express dismay at the report, which also found that 7 per cent of the young people questioned had bought lottery tickets or scratchcards illegally in the previous week.

He will say that Camelot, as well as retailers and parents, must do more to stop shopkeepers selling tickets and scratchcards to adolescents.

Mr Stoker will call, specifically, for Camelot to submit arrangements for a significantly increased programme of test purchases; take tougher action against retailers who make under-age sales, particularly where such sales are negligent or deliberate; submit an action plan stating how it will achieve targets to reduce such sales; and propose arrangements for measuring progress against the figures produced by Dr Sue Fisher, director of Plymouth University's research centre, into the social impact of gambling.

Her study of almost 10,000 children in 114 schools, which was commissioned by Oflot, found that 5 per cent of children had become problem gamblers. Three per cent had a problem with fruit machines, 1 per cent with scratchcards and 1 per cent with both.

The problems included spending more than £10 a day, using their dinner money to play and stealing to purchase cards. Ten per cent of those who spent their own money on fruit machines or scratchcards had sold possessions so that they could do so.

Camelot insisted that it was working to prevent under-age sales and a spokesman said it believed it had the most rigorous controls in the industry. "However, the research has highlighted that this is a problem facing many sectors and not limited to the National Lottery."

Dr Mark Griffiths of Nottingham Trent University, who published a similar report earlier this week, said: "There is a small but significant minority of children having problems with the lottery and scratchcards. Camelot should lobby to raise the age limit to 18 and be harder on the shopkeepers."



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A sorry performance as Yeo goes over the top

Being an MP is never wanting to say sorry. MPs regret other people's failings, instead. Tony Blair has apologised for the Irish potato famine, expressed sorrow that we misunderstood Bernie Ecclestone's donation, and is said to be contemplating an apology for the events of Bloody Sunday a quarter of a century ago. But to say "I was wrong and I apologise" is something MPs find hard.

Mr Meacher moves among the ace-strikers at Westminster rather as might an aardvark wander on to a football pitch: relatively safe because he is not part of the march and nobody wants to eat him — but hardly part of the action. It is hard to imagine him moving intentionally offside, though he might do so by mistake.

Has done, in fact. Before showing a consultation paper on the right to roam to MPs, he showed the document to dangerous revolutionaries like the Country Landowners' Association and the sinister forces of the Moorlands Association. This is a deadly parliamentary sin. MPs must always be the first to know.

So what Meacher should have done was leak the paper (via an untraceable third party) to a Tory. Then he could have raged against the Tories for stealing the document, and the press for publishing it. Instead, Meacher had been honest. Consequently, the Tories were raging against him.

He had shown contempt for Parliament, they said. Characteristically, he had not tried to wriggle out of this, but come to the House with a full apology. He made it, and sat down. Score at half time: Tories 1; Labour 0.

But in the second half, the Tory team blundered. Tim Yeo, Opposition spokesman, should gracefully have accepted the apology, noting sadly that this kind of thing was all too common with the new Government and adding that few of its members had the good grace to own up as Meacher had done.

IN BRIEF Unsettled prisoners moved to new unit

Four of Britain's most disruptive prisoners are the first inmates of a new, £3 million high-security unit that officially opened yesterday.

Charles Bronson, an armed robber and the country's most violent prisoner; Michael Sams, a kidnapper and murderer; Fred Low, serving four life sentences; and Anthony McCullagh, a double murderer, have been moved to the unit in Woodhill jail near Milton Keynes in an attempt to break behaviour that has resulted in them being moved regularly.

Prison hanging
Ian Colligan, 35, who had been 15 months on remand at Belmarsh jail, southeast London, hanged himself by his laces, an inquest at Southwark was told. The charge cannot be identified for legal reasons. The hearing continues.

Firearms fine
A gun dealer who campaigned against a ban on firearms after the Dunblane massacre has been fined £1,000 for possessing illegal weapons. Richard Law, 45, of Cardiff, admitted six charges under the Firearms Act at Swansea Crown Court.

Bird case fails
A fish farmer was cleared of shooting cormorants, a protected species, near a wildfowl reserve. Milton Keynes magistrates were told that no one had seen David Marle, 57, use his gun near the Arc reserve at Great Linford, Buckinghamshire.

Still protesting
Women still picketing the former American airbase at Greenham Common in Berkshire were given leave by the Court of Appeal to challenge a £2.2 million enterprise centre to provide premises for nearly 100 small businesses.

Farmer settles
Paul Foskett, 44, who sued a farmer for £80,000 after a bull tossed him over a wall into a bed of nettles, has agreed to an out-of-court settlement. He said Graham McClymont advised him to tap the beast on the nose if cattle followed him.



MATTHEW PARRIS
POLITICAL SKETCH

Parliamentary traditions have been centuries in the making," he bellowed. "Men and women have given their lives to protect them!"

Pur-lease! — as a dumbed-down sketch might cry. We yield to none in our admiration for Mr Yeo, but the image of those Gucci shoes and that Hilditch & Key striped shirt storming blood-spattered from the trenches as Yeo sprints — Uzi 9mm blazing — on a suicide mission to protect page 347 (Ministerial Statements) of Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice from a Fleet Street raiding party, stretches credulity. Sympathy switched to Meacher. Tories 1; Labour 1.

Or should we say Labour 2? — for Tony Blair had the edge over William Hague at Prime Minister's Questions. Emphatic, confident and dismissive, the Prime Minister wrongfooted his opposite number by completely denying a report about his welfare benefit plans.

Brown agrees to childcare payments for lone parents

By Jill Sherman and Nicholas Watt

GORDON BROWN has bowed to backbench pressure on lone-parent benefit cuts and agreed to extra cash payments for all families to help with childcare costs.



Field: hinted at role for means-testing in reforms

Single parents already on benefit would only have their payments reduced if they took a job and then had to go back on benefit if they lost it.

Last December 47 MPs rebelled over the proposed cut backs and there was widespread concern among backbenchers that existing single parents would be discouraged from taking up jobs.

Government sources last night also made clear that the Social Security Bill, which is now in the Lords, would not return to the Commons until the fresh measures were introduced.

Minister stressed in the Commons that there was no question of discriminating against married couples and his official spokesman made clear that single parents would not be given more help than all families.

However, the additional benefit payment to non-working families will ensure that single mothers taking work will know they will be able to claim a similar amount if they lose their job.

William Hague accused Mr Blair of a U-turn which would lead to higher welfare costs. The initial plan to cut benefits was designed to save £400 million but the new proposals would add much more to expenditure, he said.

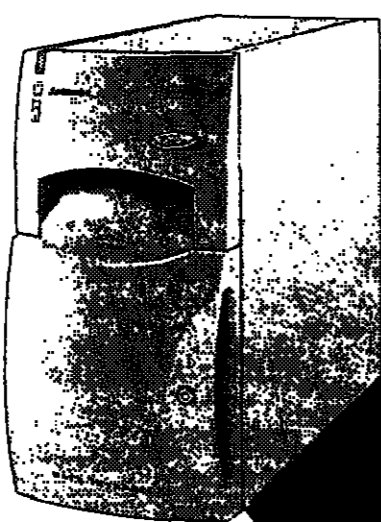
Ms Harman and the Welfare Reform Minister Frank Field hinted yesterday that future welfare reforms could include means-testing of pensions or taxation of child benefit.



Harriet Harman before the social security committee yesterday. She hinted that child benefit could be taxed

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Belfast sorting office bombed

A LETTER bomb exploded in Belfast's Royal Mail sorting office yesterday. Four employees were injured and 1,800 others were told to leave the building as army bomb disposal experts moved in.

Morris warns of strikes in ballot row

ONE OF Britain's most powerful trade unionists predicted strike action yesterday in the campaign to secure union recognition in the workplace.

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Bones give clue to things that go bark in the night

Find may have solved mystery of spaniel haunting Jacobean manor, writes Nick Nuttall

FOR nearly 200 years visitors to the Jacobean Ham House in Richmond, southwest London, have reported sightings of a ghostly spaniel.

Horace Walpole is the first to have recorded the house's ghostly inhabitants, including the dog and the first Countess and Duchess of Lauderdale.

Those who have seen the animal have described it as resembling a small King Charles spaniel of the kind that appears, cradled in the arms of Grace Carteret — in a painting in the house by the court artist Kneller, dating from around 1710.

Now the mystery may have been solved after researchers working for the National Trust, which owns the Thameside property, discovered the carefully laid out remains of a small dog during excavations of the orangery.

The orangery was the showpiece. And here he was found neatly laid out in a trench relating to the 17th century in front of what we believe was once an ornamental fountain. So quite a prestigious place to put a dog. It was clearly no mutt," said Jan Graffius, property manager at the house.

Studies of the bones, which have now been placed in a sand box, have been made. "There are difficulties because of changes in breeding over the past three centuries. But we are advised that they could be of a spaniel-like dog. Certainly they date from the right period to be a Cavalier King Charles spaniel," said Mrs Graffius. She believes the dog could have been owned by the notorious first Countess and



The bones of a spaniel-like dog found during excavations in the orangery

Duchess of Lauderdale, who would have "had a troupe of dogs. They were the fashion accessory of the day."

The first countess, who lived in the late 17th century, is fabled to be the ghostly hand behind slamming doors and sightings of a black widow at Ham House. Researchers have found other images of the hound in art on the walls of the round gallery and near the main staircase, where the ghostly spaniel is said to scamper.

Another painting of the countess, with her children, shows a similar dog, as does the painting by Titian on the stairs. "Strangely enough the Titian is on the bend of the stairs where the dog most frequently appears," said Mrs Graffius. "It has also been seen outside on the terrace. There was even one lady who complained to us about a small, brown and white dog, that jumped up at her and then disappeared."

Sightings of the dog are running at about two a season,

said Mrs Graffius, who has been at the house for four years. Many people who see the dog complain to staff that pets should not be allowed inside. Glen McNeill, a volunteer steward, recalled yesterday a recent conversation with two visitors. "I said: 'And of course there is the dog.' One of the ladies turned white and clutched my arm, and her friend stuttered that she had just seen one on the staircase," she said.

"We had a gabbled discussion on the type of dog that had allegedly been seen in the house over the years. The lady said that the one she had seen had been white, with markings on his side and head. She had seen it on the landing of the Great Staircase, by the door to the museum room. By this time all three of us were covered in goose pimples, in spite of the heat in the room."

Horace Walpole, in his *Diary and Collected Writings of 1770*, says of Ham House: "At every step one's spirits sink



at the top of the house, admits she was a sceptic about ghosts until taking up the post. But her family's experiences have put paid to any doubts.

"I have not seen the dog, but Bella, our Weimaraner, all of a sudden took off like a scalded cat onto the terrace making great holes in the gravel with her feet. There was nothing there. She had never behaved like that before," said Mrs Graffius.

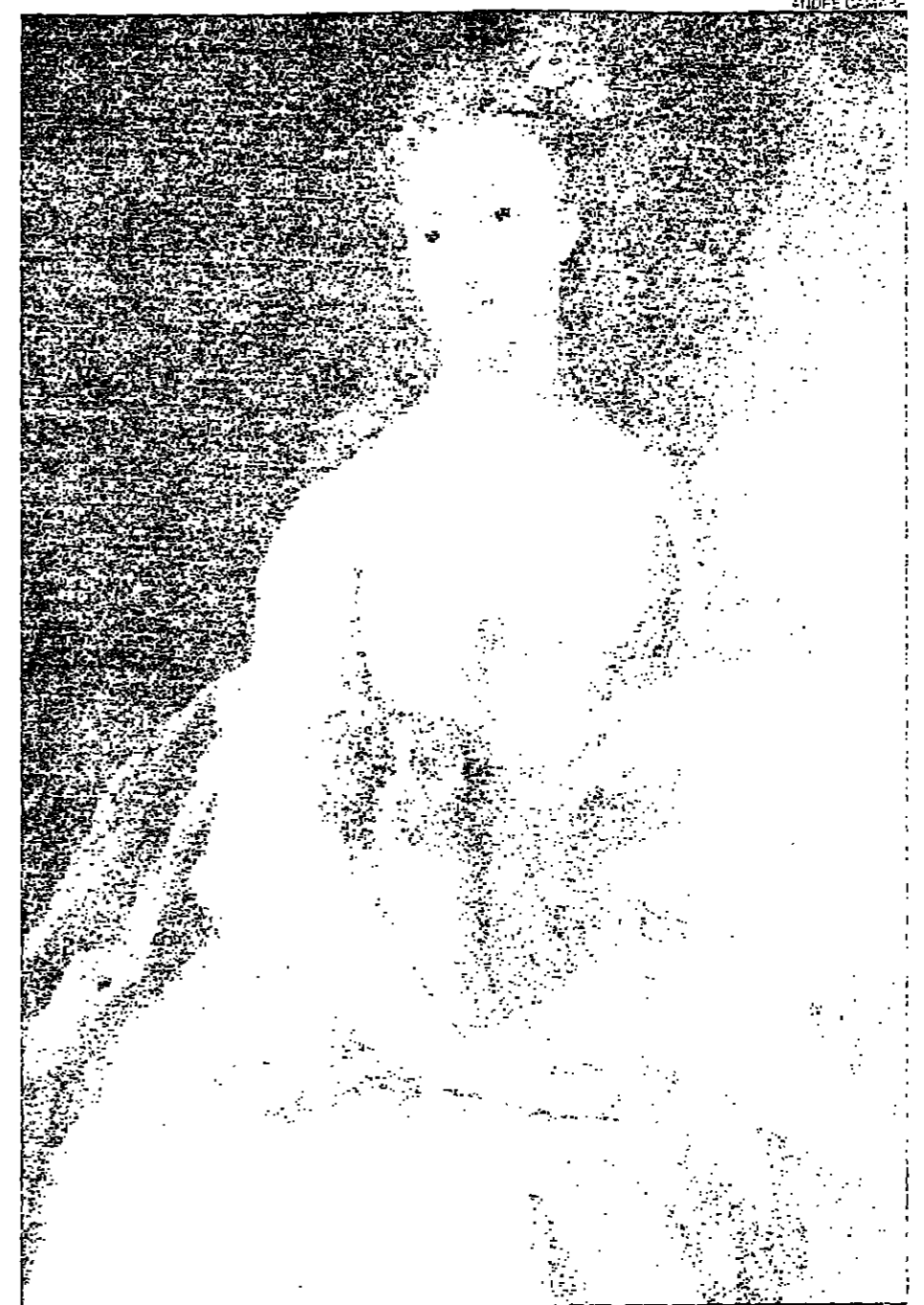
And then there are the sound of metal-tipped heels which come up the main staircase at night, when the house is shut, and stop outside the door of the flat. "That can happen three or four times in an evening. The children have heard it too. I have heard things slamming, like furniture falling over, and have run upstairs to see if the children are alright. Oh, door slamming in rooms that no longer exist, that kind of thing. We had the odd babysitter call us up when we were out for dinner pleading with us to come back no matter what."

She said she heard the smoking ghosts in the marble dining room the most bizarre. "You can enter the marble dining room and there is this smell of pungent sweet tobacco smoke. You cannot smoke in the house and there are smoke detectors everywhere. Yet they never go off," said Mrs Graffius.

Every minute I expected to see ghosts sweeping by, ghosts I would not get sixpence to see: Lauderdale, Tollemaches and Maitlands," Mrs Graffius said. Walpole often visited Ham House because "Charlotte, his illegitimate niece, married the fifth Earl of Dysart".

In late March the house will open its doors to ghost tours to be run on Saturdays. Mrs Graffius said they planned to include the dog's haunts in the tour, along with the first countess's bedchambers where, it is said, visitors can hear her dragging furniture across the floor.

Mrs Graffius, whose husband, Christopher, and children Charles, 9, Elizabeth, 7, and Catriona, 4, lived in a flat



The painting of the spaniel that is believed to be haunting the staircase



Ham House in Richmond, with property manager Jan Graffius inside

Vatican changes rites for casting out devils

A SURGE in demand for exorcisms has led the Vatican to revise the ritual and prayers used.

The changes come as one of the Roman Catholic Church's leading exorcists said yesterday that he had yet to encounter a case of genuine demonic possession.

The Congregation for the Divine Sacraments and Divine Worship has nearly finished the ten-year task of rewriting the formulae for deliverance. The texts are more than 400 years old.

The changes to the rite are not expected to alter the key part, where the demon is ordered to leave the person, but to shorten the accompanying prayers and invocations. The language is likely to be stronger, with instructions included for what vestments the priest should wear and how he should act, according to the *Catholic Herald*.

However, Father Louis McRave, 55, the official exorcist for the Birmingham archdiocese, said that, in more than 80 cases he had been involved in during the past ten years, none had involved real possession. Instead, nearly all those who came seeking exorcisms were people who were disturbed or psychiatrically ill.

Public demand for exorcisms has never been greater. In Italy, the number of priests carrying out exorcisms has risen from 20 six years ago to 300. Fears of demonic possession, thought to be fuelled in part by films such as *The Exorcist*, can lead both Catholics and non-Catholics to turn to the church for help. But in Britain, symptoms that might in some countries be put down to demonic possession are more often put down to mental problems, and the individual referred to a doctor.

Those Catholic priests who are convinced they are dealing with a case of genuine possession are forced to use a lengthy, Latin rite that has its origins in the Council of Trent in the 16th century and has been only partly modified in the centuries since then.

The rite was one of the few to escape updating during the reforms of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. It includes line such as: "Behold the Cross of the Lord: Depart, all adverse creatures" and: "I abjure you, most ancient demon... that you depart from this member of God's family." It also includes the entire eleventh chapter of Luke's Gospel.

Father McRave said: "It is very lengthy and in some ways it is repetitive. The Lord himself in the gospels was an exorcist, but in his case he just told the thing, the creature, the demon, to go. And it went."

"But my own experience is that I am very uncertain that I have ever come across a case of real possession. Only twice have I ever wondered, and in one case I did read the full Latin rite over the person. But there was to my mind no sign at the end of anything supernatural."

In the Church of England, there is no official exorcism rite, the nearest thing being the "communion", or denouncing of sinners, in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, said in at least one Anglican church yesterday to mark Ash Wednesday.

The demand for exorcism is unprecedented, reports Ruth Gledhill, but may be misleading

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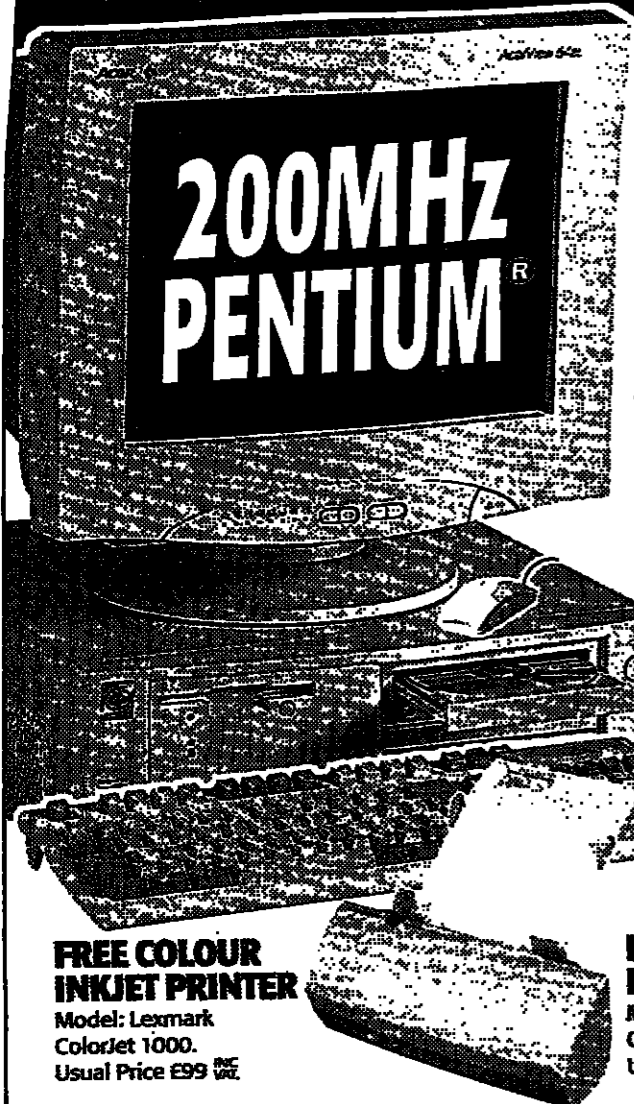
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Singer turns on Blair and pop party luvvies

By POLLY NEWTON
POLITICAL REPORTER

NEW Labour's love affair with the pop world cooled a few more degrees yesterday when Damon Albarn, lead singer of Blur, launched a scathing attack on the Government.

He was speaking alongside the left-wing Labour MP Ken Livingstone at a meeting in the Commons to protest against the introduction of tuition fees for students. Albarn said: "I am not surprised that most people want to stay well clear of Labour and its ideas."

He said he had entered the political fray only because he felt so strongly about the issue of free higher education. "This is such a basic right that we have had for years and years and I couldn't sit back and watch it happen." The introduction of tuition fees would make many people unhappy "and I don't think that is good for the culture in general."

The singer accused the Government of hypocrisy. "They make such an issue of being a young government and yet they are taking away a fundamental right of being young." He was critical of other musicians who have attended high-profile parties hosted by Tony Blair in Downing Street. "I think that the sort of display when Labour won the election and everyone turning up at Number 10, was pretty disgusting. It was vulgar."



Damon Albarn and Ken Livingstone: united in their opposition to tuition fees

Theatre leader attacks 'car boot sale' funding

By DALYA ALBERGE

THE artistic director of the English Shakespeare Company has accused the Government of reducing arts funding to the level of a "car boot sale".

Michael Bogdanov says in the *New Statesman* that Labour has "blown it". "There has been a staggering misreading of the public mood in all areas. How do I feel? Like a turkey that's voted for Christmas." "Twenty years on the situation is worse than any of us could have imagined, and the terrifying thing is how hard it is to make a special case for the arts when so many other areas cry out for assistance: hospitals, schools... Museums are charging, contracting, shutting for whole days... Orchestras are merging. Theatres are closing. The three-R ruling will make it even harder to teach arts subjects in primary schools."



Michael Bogdanov: Labour has 'blown it'

Referring to how Peter Jonas, former head of the English National Opera and head of the Bavarian State Opera has laughed off speculation that he might return to save the English National Opera, he says: "What? Give up a budget of DM18 million and a minister of culture who visits me only once a year and says 'Everything all right. Peter? Anything you want?'"

He adds: "Germany has 75 opera houses and each of the 16 Länder has its own culture minister. Aah! Shteen Chris Smiths. A man who failed to act decisively over the premature departure of the populist Genista McIntosh and the hastily indecent substitution of Mary Allen as chief executive of the Royal Opera House."

Arts, pages 34-37

Inquiry into 'secret' law jobs

By FRANCES GIBB
LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

THE Attorney-General is to investigate an inquiry that could end the "secret" system of appointing barristers to the sought-after panel of 100 lawyers who act for the Government in court actions.

IRVINE FACES SECOND BIAS CLAIM

The Lord Chancellor is facing a second claim of discrimination over the appointment of his special adviser, Marjita Osmor, a Labour Party activist, as his special adviser. The Lord Chancellor's Department said it denied sexual and racial discrimination and that both cases would be "vigorously contested".

IRVINE FACES SECOND BIAS CLAIM

Chancellor. Mr Sales, who at 35 is young for the post, was chosen over at least three other barristers who were considered front-runners, although he is regarded as highly able. The Treasury Devil, officially the First Junior Treasury Counsel, is effectively the Government's chief advocate who acts in all big civil cases and has a guaranteed source of income. The Attorney-General's inquiry, which may be announced next week, will look at how to ensure that the system not only appoints on merit but appears to do so. One option would be to advertise the jobs and hold an open competition for them.

IRVINE FACES SECOND BIAS CLAIM

Sara Leslie, Ms Hayes's solicitor, said that the Treasury panels were dominated by men and appointments were made on the "old boy" network and not subject to any objective criteria. "The Attorney-General should be committed to the elimination of discrimination. Unless the appointments are advertised and there is a transparent system of selection, no one can have any confidence that gender is not a criterion for selection." As well as the appointment of Mr Sales, two other jobs had gone to men. Ms Hayes, a first-class honours graduate from Oxford, alleges she was given no opportunity to apply for or consider appointment to the various panels.

Firm aims to hit Net with soccer

By NIGEL HAWKES

FOOTBALL supporters who have computers could soon be able to watch games live on the Internet. They will not see players but computerised figures in team colours who will move about the field just as the real players do. To make this possible, players will have to wear microchips sewn into their shirts. The Internet can show moving images, but they are jerky and prone to stalling. By simplifying the system into a form of cartoon animation, an Israeli electronics company says it has found a solution. Mily Tamir, Vice-President of Orad Hi Tec Systems, told *New Scientist*: "We've done our first feasibility test and it works perfectly."

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Archers make a death in

BBC chief's late poor reception... Coronation Street is attacked for violence... MP's

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Archers make hay from a death in the family

Farming soap takes the chance to kill off a departing character and to give its public profile a boost.

Damian Whitworth listens in

THERE has not been a death to match since Mark Hebden, the pregnant Sheila Archer's husband, was killed off in a car crash in 1994. Last night, after unprecedented BBC hype, *The Archers* suffered another dramatic character loss with the death of John Archer in an agricultural accident.

The demise of Tony and Pat Archer's son, under an overturned tractor, was necessitated by the decision of the actor Sam Berriscale, 23, to leave the radio soap.

Radio 4 had trailed the episode heavily, telling listeners that if they listened only once all year, last night's episode was the one they should not miss. The BBC seized the opportunity to create a plotline to boost ratings

and create ripples in Ambridge for years to come. Those who tuned in would have begun to feel uneasy when Tony Archer set out to look for John after he failed to return home. He was accompanied by his other son, Tommy, who made ominous comments about the state John was in - his proposal to Hayley had been rejected, he was still furious about his affair with Sharon. They found the tractor, the episode ending with Tony breaking down on discovering John's cold body.

To create maximum effect, the BBC had disclosed that it had shredded the actor's scripts after recording the episode, and that the tapes were being kept under lock and key. Vanessa Whitburn,



Tony Archer (Colin Skipp) found the body

the programme's editor, said she had wanted to give Mr Berriscale a good send-off after almost ten years in *The Archers*, and to add new listeners to the four million who tune in each week.

She said: "As regular listeners know, it is a myth that Ambridge is always a cosy place and *The Archers* needs a

news headline from time to time. The team enjoyed giving Sam such an exciting storyline to, literally, go out on. He has been great to work with and we wish him well for the future."

She said the decision to leave had been Mr Berriscale's, who had had many offers of work. The actor has been playing the role of John since he was 13; he has also appeared in Royal Shakespeare Company productions and on television.

Mr Berriscale, who said he felt the time was right for a change of direction, had even had to keep the news of his character's imminent demise from his mother, Rosemary. "She runs a bakery in Worcester and people are always asking her what is happening. The first she would have known was when the show was broadcast."

The first Archer to die suddenly was Grace Archer, who passed away in Phil's arms after being injured in a fire. The first death was that of Bill Slater, as a result of a fight with Bert Matthews outside The Bull in 1951.



John Archer (Sam Berriscale) with former girlfriend Hayley Jordan (Lucy Davis)

Merger threat to 60 jobs in radio

By Raymond Snoddy, Media Editor

THE BBC department that produces such long-running series as *Woman's Hour*, *Desert Island Discs* and *Start the Week* is to lose its autonomy in a merger with another department. More than 60 jobs could be lost in London, Manchester and Bristol.

Topical Features is to become part of BBC Features and Events, a multimedia department that already produces programmes such as *You and Yours* and *The Food Programme*. The enlarged department will be run by Anne Morrison, Anne Winder, head of Topical Features, will take early retirement.

Andy Parfitt, 39, has been appointed controller of Radio 1, succeeding Matthew Bannister. He is currently deputy controller at the station.

BBC chiefs face poor reception from MPs

By Andrew Pierce

SENIOR directors of the BBC will face a hostile reception from a Commons committee today over the decision to shunt *Yesterday in Parliament* on Radio 4's longwave frequency only.

Will Wyatt, the chief executive of BBC Broadcasting, and Matthew Bannister, the managing director of Network Radio BBC, are due to appear before the Commons Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport. They will face questions over the decision to move the programme, which will almost certainly result in lower audiences.

Gerald Kaufman, the committee's chairman, has made no secret of his anger. There will also be displeasure over the decision to move *The Week in Westminster* from Saturday morning to Thursday evening.

With the BBC already criticised for "dumbing down" by Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's press secretary, it can expect little mercy from the all-party committee. One member of the committee said last night: "It raises questions about the BBC's commitment to the coverage of Parliament."

Coronation Street is attacked for violence

By Emma Wilkins

A COMPLAINT about violence in an episode of *Coronation Street* has been upheld by the Broadcasting Standards Commission.

The scene, in which Don Brennan took Mike Baldwin hostage after burning down his factory and kidnapping his wife, was inappropriate for a programme at 7.30pm, the BSC said. Granada TV, which makes the show, claimed that, although it was clear that Brennan had beaten Baldwin, the violence was not shown in the episode last October.

The BSC also upheld 11 complaints of bad language, violence and the trivialisation of death about Oliver Stone's film *Natural Born Killers*, which was shown on Channel 5 in November at 10.50pm. "The violence was graphic and sustained, verging on the mindless," the commission said.

A *World in Action* documentary broadcast on ITV at 8pm, which showed a female stripper performing in front of an audience of police officers, was also criticised for exceeding the boundaries "acceptable for broadcast at that time."



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New row looms over beef-ban exemptions

THE stage was set yesterday for a fresh fight over "mad cow" disease when the European Commission bowed to pressure from Germany, the US and other countries and announced plans to exempt them from measures to ban beef on the bone and other BSE "risk materials".

The Commission's decision, bitterly attacked by Ireland, raises the prospect of a European Union challenge to Britain's unilateral block on the sale of imported meat which has not been deboned. It could also complicate the laborious negotiations to ease the export ban on British beef.

In a classic EU compromise, the Commission sought to defuse a fight over anti-BSE measures which has been going on since it decided last July that all member states, plus countries sending meat to the EU, must remove "specified risk materials" (SRMs), including the brain, spinal cord and eyes of cattle, sheep and goats, at the abattoir. The Commission decided to delay for the second time the implementation of the SRM ban

■ A move by the European Commission to exclude Germany and others from the proposed ban on "risk materials" is a classic EU compromise, writes Charles Bremner

until next July, and said states could delay the move for a further six months if they applied for an exemption.

At the same time, it extended the SRM list to include meat linked to the spinal column — the rule that bans T-bone steaks and mutton chops in Britain.

Member states which have reported native cases of BSE must apply the original shorter SRM list from July 1 while awaiting the outcome of any request for "derogation". This involves Britain, Ireland, France, Portugal, Belgium, Luxembourg and The Netherlands.

All states will be given the opportunity to prove that they have a low enough BSE risk to be permanently exempted. There is no chance that Britain, with by far the biggest number of BSE cases, would win an exemption. The Com-

mission believes it had no alternative to giving way to pressure not just from Germany, which insists that it is free of BSE, but also from the United States and New Zealand. They argued that the conditions imposed an unnecessary burden and breached international trade law.

However, the plan, which needs endorsement by a majority of member states to become law, will create a two-tier system that could damage the trade of those which are ruled to have enough risk of BSE to be required to comply with the SRM list. Ireland, in particular, fears that its meat exports, already badly hit by the British epidemic, will effectively be blacklisted.

The Government said yesterday it was pleased that the EU was endorsing its argument for outlawing beef on the

bone but it was unhappy with the further delay in applying the rules and with the prospect that countries would be given unjustified exemptions.

Privately, officials hoped the concession to Germany would smooth the way for Britain's application for the export ban to be lifted for beef from certain herds in Northern Ireland. Germany, which is fiercely opposed to any resumption of British exports, and with its own industry now effectively protected from the burden of applying anti-BSE measures, is thought unlikely to be any more willing to make a concession to Britain.

British farmers were cheered yesterday by an unexpected government reversal of plans to make the beef industry pay the £70 million cost of introducing a computerised cattle tracing system to combat BSE. Jack Cunningham, the Agriculture Minister, said the Treasury would pick up the £35 million bill for the start-up, and first year's running costs, and would pay a further £35 million to implement extra controls at abattoirs.



Jodie Kidd modelling the Ghost collection at the Saatchi Gallery in London yesterday

Circus show spells end of minimalism

BY GRACE BRADBERRY, STYLE EDITOR

TANYA SARNE, the woman behind Ghost, one of Britain's most successful fashion companies, yesterday used the stark, white Saatchi Gallery in St John's Wood, North London, as an incongruous backdrop for a theatrical and at times downright flashy collection. — more *Kids From Fame* than the practice bar of the Ballets Russes that the show notes had claimed.

What the wilder excesses signalled was that Ghost is part of a growing band of designers that have dispensed with minimalism. There were even "circus" outfits — mohair-textured knit dresses worn with leather whips as belts.

Grey legwarmers, nylon jazz pants, spangly leotards and pink tights — this was the stuff of dreams for teenagers in the early 1980s, but it is doubtful that the sophisticated women who buy Ghost will want to relive the more embarrassing moments of their youth. They might, however, go for the mohair slouch sweaters, another 1980s standby, better known as the Sloppy Joe.

Later the show moved on

to sportswear — but the kind of sport that takes place on motorbikes and in the boxing ring.

Pink lambswool biker jackets had a teen movie feel, while Harlequin boxer-style dressing gowns were wonderfully Las Vegas.

As for the lurex hooded jacket and satin boxer shorts worn by the model Karen Elson, these are strictly catwalk items which will surely never make it near to Ghost's elegant store in Notting Hill, West London, nor the many American department stores that stock the label.

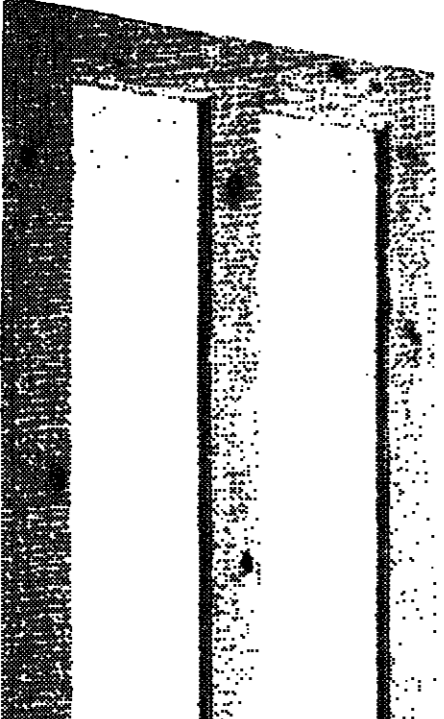
But hidden behind the "message" there were some beautiful pieces, including a tulle and jersey ruffled dress in black and silver grey, worn with a quilted stole, and little georgette dresses in petal pink and grey.

High-octane glamour came later, with long, silk-velvet lavender dresses cut asymmetrically and left unadorned.

The show closed with grey and yellow sequined petal dresses and a silk-velvet sashed body.


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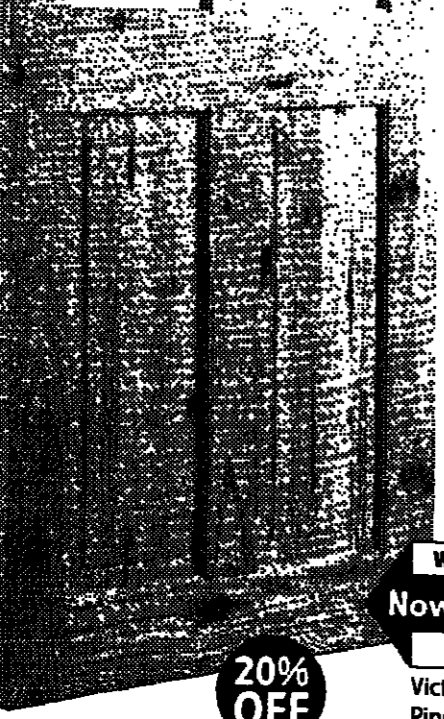
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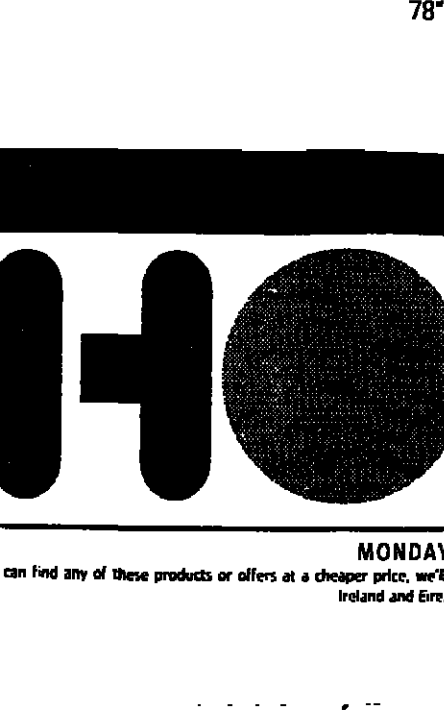
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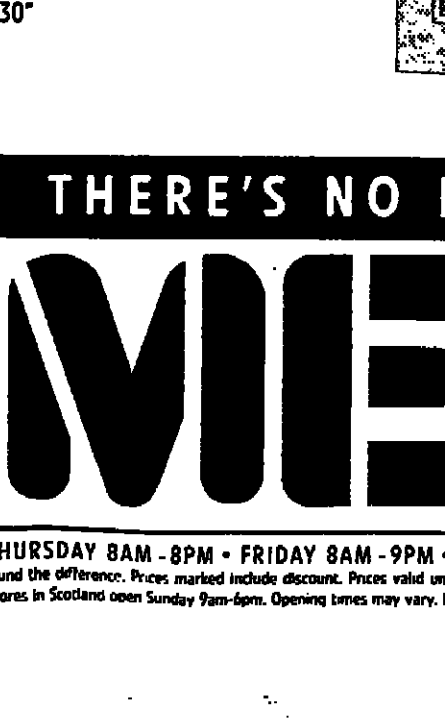
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Meacher gives ramblers freedom to roam

STEVE FORREST/QUAZIAN



Off-limits: ramblers on an organised trespass on moorland near Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire. The proposals would allow access to uncultivated land under voluntary agreements with landowners

Landowners threatened with legislation if voluntary access agreements fail, reports Michael Hornsby

LANDOWNERS were told yesterday that they will be forced by law to allow public access to most uncultivated land if they do not do so voluntarily.

The long-awaited proposals, set out by Michael Meacher, the Environment Minister, are intended to give ramblers freedom to roam over 3.5 million acres of mountain, moorland, heath, down and registered common land in England and Wales. This is

estimated to cover 12 per cent of the total land area.

Other uncultivated areas, such as woodland, cliffs, foreshore and riversides, are not covered, but Mr Meacher said the Government would ask the Countryside Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales to report on whether more access was needed to those areas as well.

The public is already free to wander over a fifth of the 1.3 million acres of common

land, but access elsewhere is generally limited to linear rights of way, such as footpaths and bridleways. Mr Meacher told a press conference in London that the Government recognised that many people "want freedom to explore more widely" and that "walking can provide real benefits for people's physical and mental wellbeing".

There had been no watering down of his proposals, Mr Meacher insisted. The commitment to introduce legislation, if that was the only way the required access could be achieved, remained firm.

The Ramblers' Association, which does not believe voluntary schemes can work, said it was disappointed that there was no clear commitment to introduce a legally binding right to roam immediately.

Landowners said they were concerned that the consultation paper, *Access to the Open Countryside*, did not indicate how long they would be given to negotiate voluntary schemes or what the criteria would be.

Mr Meacher said the Government would decide whether the voluntary option stood a

chance of success after three months of consultation with ramblers, landowners and other interested parties, ending on June 5. He refused to be drawn on reports that landowners might be granted a grace period of up to two years. There has been speculation that the Government does not want to legislate for a right to roam while hereditary peers, many of them big landowners, still have voting powers.

Mr Meacher said a proper balance would have to be struck between the rights of ramblers and those whose property would be affected. "The principle of greater access is not negotiable... but

there is no question of allowing people to trample over farmers' crops or trapse through back gardens."

Mr Meacher said surveys showed that two out of three ramblers preferred to stick to marked routes, and that it was unlikely his proposals would lead to people wandering everywhere.

The consultation paper says the "the Government's proposals would not involve any extension of rights of access to developed land or to land used for agriculture, other than for extensive grazing".

Kate Ashbrook, chairman of the Ramblers' Association, said: "We are encouraged by the tone of the proposals, but

we would be very disappointed if landowners are given more time, after the end of the three months' consultation, to demonstrate whether the voluntary approach will work."

Ian MacNicol, president of the Country Landowners' Association, said: "We share the Government's desire to improve access to our open countryside, but believe this is best done by negotiating voluntary access agreements — not by legislating to create a 'right to roam'."

Among the criteria that voluntary access agreements would have to satisfy, according to Mr Meacher, would be the extent of the area opened up and the permanency and

AREAS OF RESTRICTED LAND WHERE WALKERS WANT PUBLIC RIGHT OF ACCESS

- **Abbeystead Estate:** 19,500 acres of heather, fells, woods and farmland east of Lancaster; owned by Duke of Westminster. Only about 12 per cent of moorland open to public. Duke says ramblers need to be confined to specific routes elsewhere to preserve grouse habitat.
- **Shirburn Hills:** 500 acres of uncultivated land near Watlington, Oxfordshire; owned by Earl of Macclesfield. One public right of way. Ramblers want right to roam freely.
- **Bonlsworth Hill:** large tract of moorland on Yorkshire-Lancashire border near Hebden Bridge; owned by Baron Savile. Rights of way, but no general freedom of access.
- **Ranmore Common:** near Dorking, Surrey; partly owned by Adrian White, who recently fenced off eight footpaths used by the public since the 1920s. Ramblers want access "as of right" to such land.
- **Snailsden Moor:** South Yorkshire; 2,950 acres of land in the Peak District National Park. Mostly wet grassland. Few rights of way, with virtually no open access. Shooting is main reason for denying free access to the public.
- **Bodmin Moor:** Cornwall; scattered tracts of moorland owned by many landowners, but with no free access for public. Locals who do not own land have ancient rights of grazing and firewood collecting.
- **High Sharpley:** Leicestershire; 20 acres of privately owned rocky outcrop and woodland. Public access denied by English Nature on grounds of nature conservation, but Ramblers' Association insists there is no proof to substantiate this claim.
- **Berwya Hills:** North Wales; owned by the Countryside Council for Wales. 9,000 acres of upland moor, denied free access for agricultural and conservation reasons. Only one linear right of way. Ramblers say it is uncultivated land that should have wider access.
- **The Caewr, Brecon Beacons:** Wales; part of 12,000-acre privately owned estate in upland area of the national park. Only two rights of way which are often closed because of erosion caused by ramblers. No free access to open moorland.

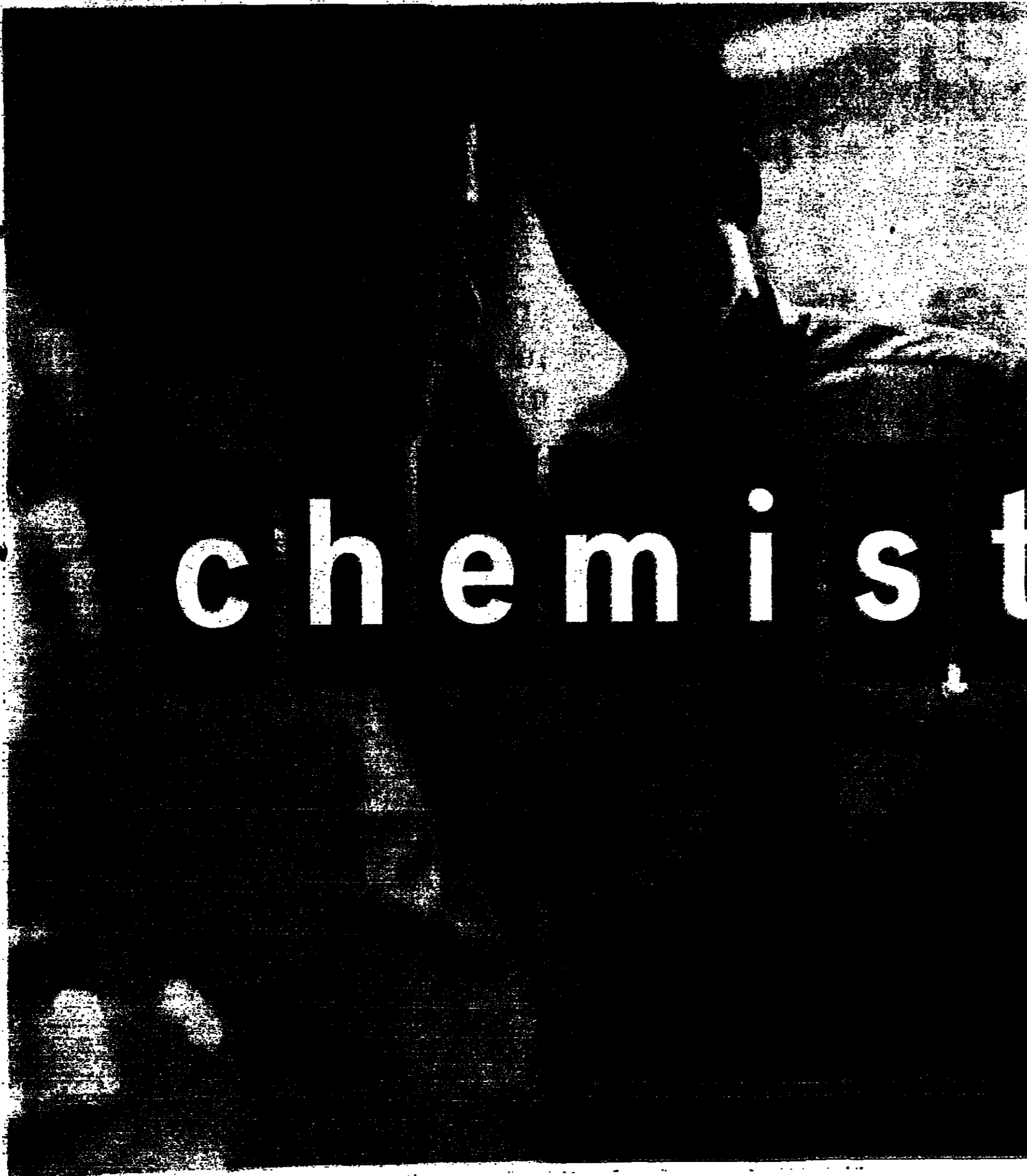


Kate Ashbrook of the Ramblers' Association doubted that Michael Meacher's voluntary plan would work

Association, whose 50,000 members own 60 per cent of England and Wales, has said it would consider legal action if a compulsory right to roam were introduced. It believes that it would have a strong claim to damages under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Tim Yeo, the Tory environment spokesman, said: "From the Prime Minister down, Labour MPs have spent the past three years promising that a statutory right to roam would be enshrined in law once Labour came to power. Their conversion to the merits of voluntary access agreements is one broken promise we can welcome."

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Harding inquest sets scene for damages claim

BY RUSSELL JENKINS

A BATTLE for compensation running to many millions of pounds will follow the inquest verdict yesterday that Matthew Harding, the vice-chairman of Chelsea Football Club, died accidentally in a helicopter crash, along with the four others on board.

A solicitor acting for the insurance tycoon's estate said immediately after the hearing that insurance claims would be made against a number of parties.

Ruth Harding, 44, Mr Harding's widow, was not at Knutsford Crown Court to hear the expected verdict of accidental death for each of the five men after a two-day hearing.

Vicky Jaramillo, Mr Harding's mistress and mother of his daughter Ella, 3, had listened intently to the evidence but had left the courtroom moments before the jury returned, to be with Penny Garner, the partner of John Bauldie, 43, another passenger on the flight. Ms Garner had burst into tears as the tension rose.

Mrs Harding and Ms Jaramillo are likely to be the main beneficiaries of any insurance action against MCA Ltd, the pilot's com-



Harding had annual income of £7 million

sole pilot and managing director of MCA.

Mr Harding and three friends were being flown home from a football match between Bolton and Chelsea in October, 1996, when the helicopter crashed in a field in Middlewich, Cheshire. The inquest was told that Mr Goss, 38, from Wilton, Wiltshire, had probably become disorientated shortly before the aircraft hit the ground and burst into flames.

Mr Harding, Mr Goss, Raymond Deane, 43, a businessman from Camberley, Surrey, Tony Burridge, 39, from Wimbledon, South London, and Mr Bauldie, 47, a journalist, were all killed instantly.

The helicopter was 22 minutes into its flight when the pilot, who did not have clearance to fly the machine using instruments only, appeared to lose sight of the ground. A witness saw the pilot attempt a stall turn. The aircraft banked steeply, spun around and dived at speed into the ground 1,000ft below.

John Hibbert, the Coroner, suggested to the jury that the reason the pilot got into such difficulties may never be fully known. However, he pinpointed a vital misunderstanding between the air



Vicky Jaramillo, left, and Ruth Harding, who are likely to be the main beneficiaries of any insurance action

traffic controller and the pilot during their radio exchanges. He said in his summing-up that the pilot had told the air traffic controller that he wanted to avoid the high ground "to the south of you when convenient".

There appeared to be a misunderstanding over

whose convenience. Earlier, Jeremy Barnett, Air Accident Investigator Branch operations investigator, told the hearing that he believed the air traffic controller had understood that to mean her convenience.

He said the controller took it to mean that the pilot



Crash pilot may have tried to do too much

BY ARTHUR LEATELEY, TRANSPORT CORRESPONDENT

THE pilot of the helicopter in which Matthew Harding and four others died had probably been trying to do "more than was achievable", the inquest into the deaths was told yesterday.

Michael Charles, the chief accident investigator, said that Michael Goss had been trying to pilot the aircraft alone at night with no co-pilot, while trying to intercept and talk to air traffic control at the same time.

Helicopter pilots have become increasingly concerned about the demands being made on them by businessmen anxious to fit between meetings. Several helicopter charter companies have told pilots that they must not allow themselves to be pressured into making a dangerous flight.

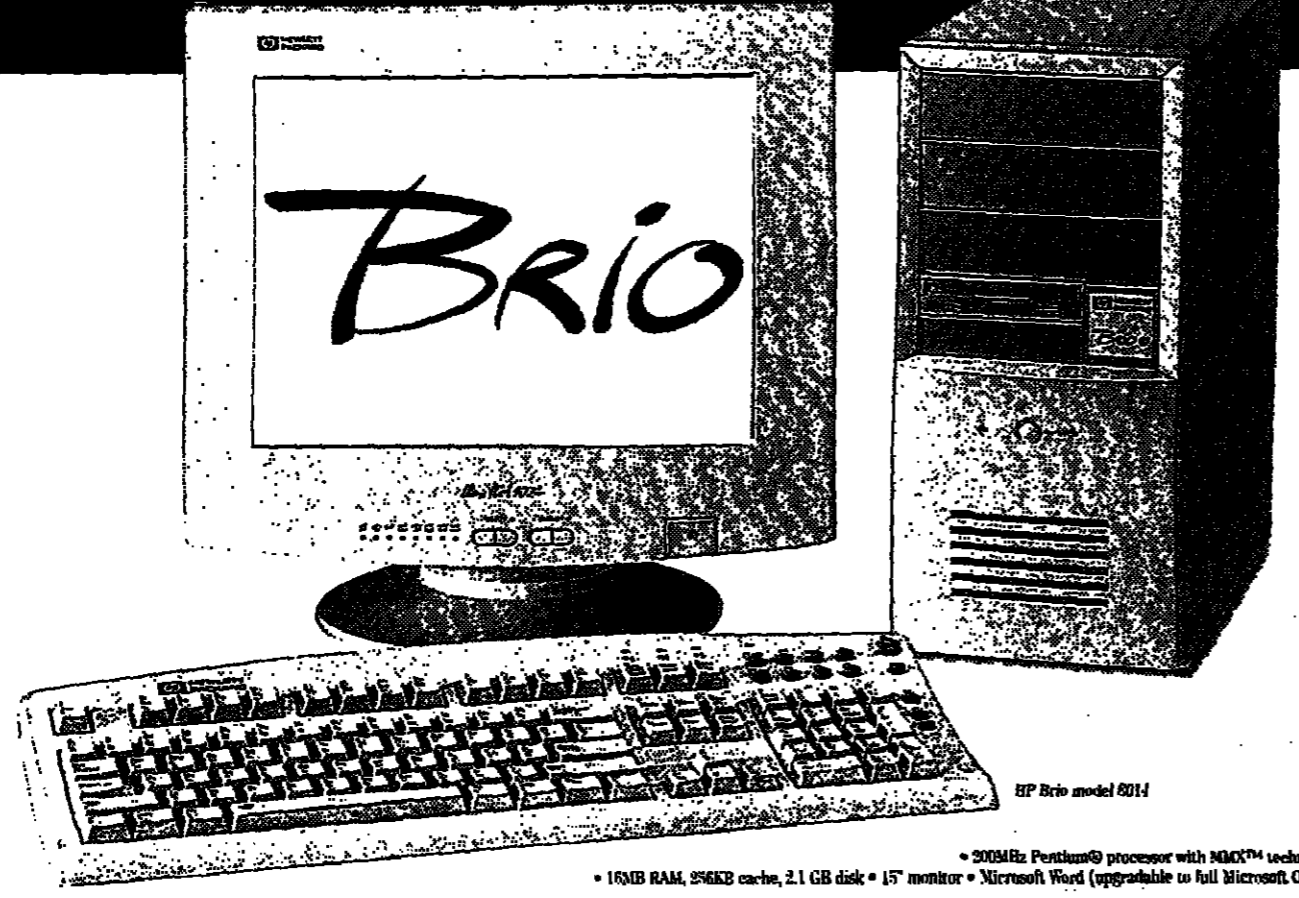
Most helicopter pilots are unqualified to fly by instrument alone, leaving them vulnerable in poor weather conditions. Training to become "instrument-rated" costs £30,000, and few pilots see the need to prepare for the worst flying conditions, in which they would normally refuse to fly.

However, one senior pilot said: "In the past, no one would question a pilot's decision, but the pressure of work does place some pilots in a difficult situation."

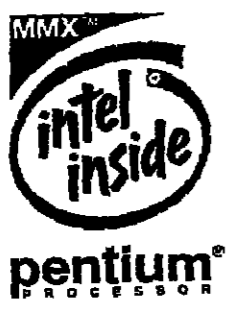
wanted to avoid the high ground by being routed along a safe corridor to Shawbury (a radar beacon) before turning south to Birmingham. However, Mr Goss, who may have been referring to his own convenience, changed course once he had passed a set of hills.

Seconds later, the pilot asked the air traffic controller to abort the flight and let him head for Manchester. When the controller asks whether there is a problem, the pilot replies: "Affirm, I'm in a hurry." That meant he could no longer see where he was going.

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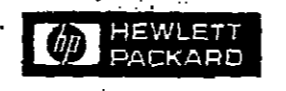
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Survivor condemns sub trips to Titanic

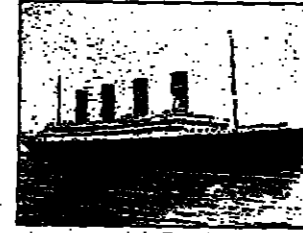
BY RICHARD DUCE

PLANS for submarine trips, costing £19,500 per person, to the wreck of the Titanic were condemned yesterday by one of the last survivors of the disaster.

Milvina Dean, 85, said last night that she was horrified by the idea of a Bristol-based firm taking sightseers to the vessel lying two miles down on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean.

Miss Dean, who was two months old when the "unsinkable" White Star liner hit an iceberg, said: "Time and time again people try to cash in on the Titanic, they should just leave her in peace. I think people who want to go and look at the wreck must be a bit peculiar and have more money than sense. My father could still be on board that ship and it is very macabre of people to go and look at it for entertainment purposes."

The travel firm Wildwings, which normally specialises in



The S.S. Titanic

bird and dolphin-watching holidays, is offering the tours from August. Mini-submarines used in the making of the current hit film Titanic will be employed.

John Brodie-Good, Wildwings managing director, will give details of the trips, lasting four to six days, at the Destinations Show at Olympia in London today.

Visitors will fly to Newfoundland and then travel by sea to a mother ship anchored above the wreck some 300 miles off the coast. The two mini-submers will each make daily descents carrying a pilot

and two travellers on a five-hour voyage.

Mr Brodie-Good, whose firm is acting as sole agent for the Isle of Man-based Deep Ocean Expeditions, said: "The subs will spend two to three hours around the wreck. The purpose is solely to see, photograph and video the ship."

He insisted that there would be no violation of the grave site, which is thought to contain most of the 1,500 people who died when the ship sank. "There will be no physical contact and no attempt will be made to remove souvenirs."

Deep Ocean Expeditions is working with the P.P. Shirsov Institute, of Moscow, which owns and operates the Finnish-built subs and the mother ship.

Wildwings was the first travel agent in Britain to offer submersible flights on American space vehicles. The first are scheduled for 2001 and about 30 people worldwide have made deposits.

Hydrogen fuel could make cars cleaner

BY NIGEL HAWKES, SCIENCE EDITOR

POLLUTION-FREE cars could be a step closer after experiments showed that hydrogen can be extracted from water at room temperature.

Two teams, one in Japan and one in Spain, have reported that they can split water into its component atoms — oxygen and hydrogen — by the use of catalysts. Hydrogen would make a much cleaner fuel for cars if a cheap means of production could be perfected.

The Japanese team, at Tokyo Institute of Technology, used a copper oxide catalyst. When mixed with distilled water and exposed to light, the catalyst broke down the water and the team was able to extract hydrogen and oxygen, *New Scientist* reports.

Researchers who have tried the technique before have found that the catalyst is quickly reduced to metallic copper, which stops the process. The Japanese team avoided this by using the catalyst in a powdered form, and says that the process lasted for 1,900 hours.

The Spanish team, at the Institute of Materials Science in Valencia, claims similar results using a catalyst made of a new molybdenum compound whose details are being kept secret while a patent is applied for.

Earlier work has shown that hydrogen can be used to run car engines with relatively little modification. It produces exhaust of water and oxides of nitrogen.

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FRIDAY FEBRUARY 26

Blair accused of breaking pledge on assisted place

A MOTHER whose daughter is to lose her assisted place at an independent girls' school accused Tony Blair yesterday of breaking a pre-election pledge.

Harriet Tillson was so concerned that Labour's proposal to abolish assisted places would affect her daughter Esther's education that she wrote to Mr Blair six months before the election. In a reply from his office dated November 1, 1996, she was assured that children already in assisted places would continue to receive assistance until they completed their education.

Now Mrs Tillson has been told that Esther, eight, will be allowed to keep her assisted place at The Maynard School in Exeter only until she is 11, not 18.

Legislation phasing out assisted places, which enable children from less well-off backgrounds to attend fee-paying schools, was passed last July. It said that places would be honoured only up to the completion of the child's current stage of education.

Hence, preparatory school pupils would lose support even if they transferred within the same school at the age of 11. Exceptions to the rule are at the discretion of David

Girl of 8 must leave her school in spite of Downing Street promise, reports Simon de Bruxelles

Blunkett, the Education Secretary, but he has yet to exercise it.

Despite Mr Blair's pledge, the Department for Education and Employment has decreed that Esther must leave the school, which has fees of £4,680 a year and which was founded 121 years ago, when she reaches the usual age for transfer to a secondary school.

Felicity Murdin, the school's headmistress, said yesterday: "It is most unfair. There is no other girls-only secondary school in Exeter, so she is being deprived of that choice."

Mrs Tillson's eldest daughter, Amy, 12, who also has an assisted place, will be allowed to continue until 18 because she was already over the age of 12 when the scheme was abolished. The family are

means-tested and pay a contribution to the school's fees, but say they will not be able to afford to keep Esther at the school if they have to pay the full amount.

Mrs Tillson wrote to Mr Blair after Amy and Esther started at Maynard in September 1996. The reply from his office said: "We do not wish to disrupt the education of individual pupils, and any children already on the scheme will continue to receive support until the end of their education."

She said yesterday: "I believe Tony Blair has broken a direct promise to me. If I had known that they were going to do this, I would not have voted for him."

"I am going to fight to keep Esther at the school and I don't want to entertain the thought of what might happen is she has to leave. She feels part of the school and is determined to stay there."

Mrs Tillson's case has been taken up by Ben Bradshaw, the Labour MP for Exeter, who wrote to Mr Blunkett. Mr Bradshaw blames a mix-up for the problem, and said yesterday: "It would not have been known that The Maynard School takes pupils from four or five up to 18. I am quite certain there was



Mrs Tillson with Esther at The Maynard School yesterday. She accused Mr Blair of betrayal

no intention to deceive Harriet."

A spokesman at the Department for Education and Employment said: "We cannot comment on individual cases, but we have never said we would enable those prima-

ry-age children on assisted places to hold their places throughout their education to the age of 18." Money saved from the assisted places scheme would be spent on reducing class sizes in state schools.

Mrs Tillson, an academic, and her husband, Andy, 45, a technician at Exeter University, said they had resigned from the Labour Party. They had been members for more than ten years.

IN BRIEF

Pig virus renews transplant concerns

The discovery of a new virus in pigs has rekindled fears about the safety of transplanting pig organs into humans. The virus, discovered by scientists in Australia, caused deformities and stillbirths among pigs and also infected two farmworkers, who developed severe flu-like symptoms. The virus was not found in pig products, but researchers are concerned about implications for transplants.

Bunker sale

A nuclear bunker buried 300ft below ground at RAF Ash, near Manston, Kent, is close to being sold. The bunker has two control rooms, a fire station, sewage works, accommodation and a maze of corridors.

Monkey theft

A man was found not guilty by Kingston Crown Court of stealing a baby monkey from Chessington World of Adventures. A confession by Thomas Anderson, 20, of Kingston upon Thames, was ruled "not entirely voluntary".

Taken for ride

A cat survived a ten-mile ride on the roof of a Transit van. Simba, a two-year-old tom, jumped on to the ladders on the van's roof in Redhill, Nottingham, and was found only when the driver stopped in Mansfield.

Golden Egg

For the first time in more than a decade, both the resident pairs of golden eagles on Egg, in the Inner Hebrides, have successfully reared chicks. The double success comes in the first year of the island's Heritage Trust.

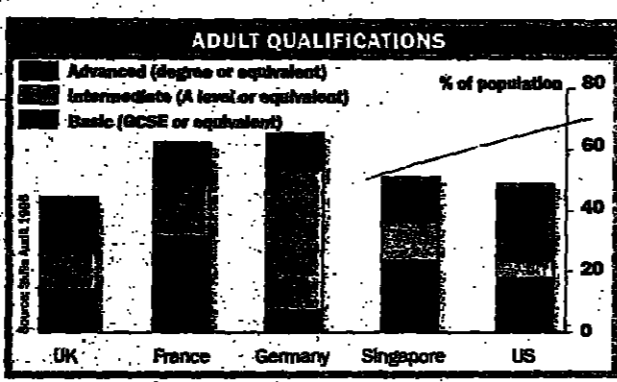
£150 grants for unqualified workers to close skills gap

By JOHN O'LEARY, EDUCATION EDITOR

A MILLION adults will be given £150 to spend on courses of their own choosing under government plans designed to close a growing skills gap between Britain and other countries.

David Blunkett, the Education and Employment Secretary, said he hoped the new "individual learning accounts", announced yesterday, would soon become as commonplace as bank accounts. This is vital because learning is the oil that makes the wheels of the economy go round.

The first grants, targeted on



areas of skills shortage and giving priority to those without qualifications in unskilled jobs, will be available next year. Learners will have to contribute £25 to open an

account, but firms will be encouraged to help to pay for relevant courses. A national helpline (on 0800 100 900) will offer advice. Officials are examining proposals for tax incentives and expect to re-route some college and training, and enterprise council (Iec) budgets to keep costs down.

The plans, to be funded initially from £150 million in Tec reserves, were contained in a series of consultation papers, which also outlined proposals for a University for Industry. A White Paper on the subject was scrapped earlier this month, prompting speculation that the full programme was not affordable.

Ms Blunkett denied the abandonment of the White Paper amounted to "downgrading" a subject that featured prominently in Labour's election manifesto. He said the

DEGREE STANDARDS TO BE SET

Universities will face new controls over the standard of degrees under government proposals announced yesterday. Expert groups will set "threshold standards" for each subject and every institution will be required to produce a code of practice to safeguard quality. The regime

was recommended by Sir Ron Dearing in his review of higher education last year.

An Institute of Learning and Teaching will be established to ensure that all new lecturers are trained to teach, and 500,000 extra places will be created in universities and colleges.

consultation papers offered a vision of another age in which people would need to be equipped to change jobs again and again.

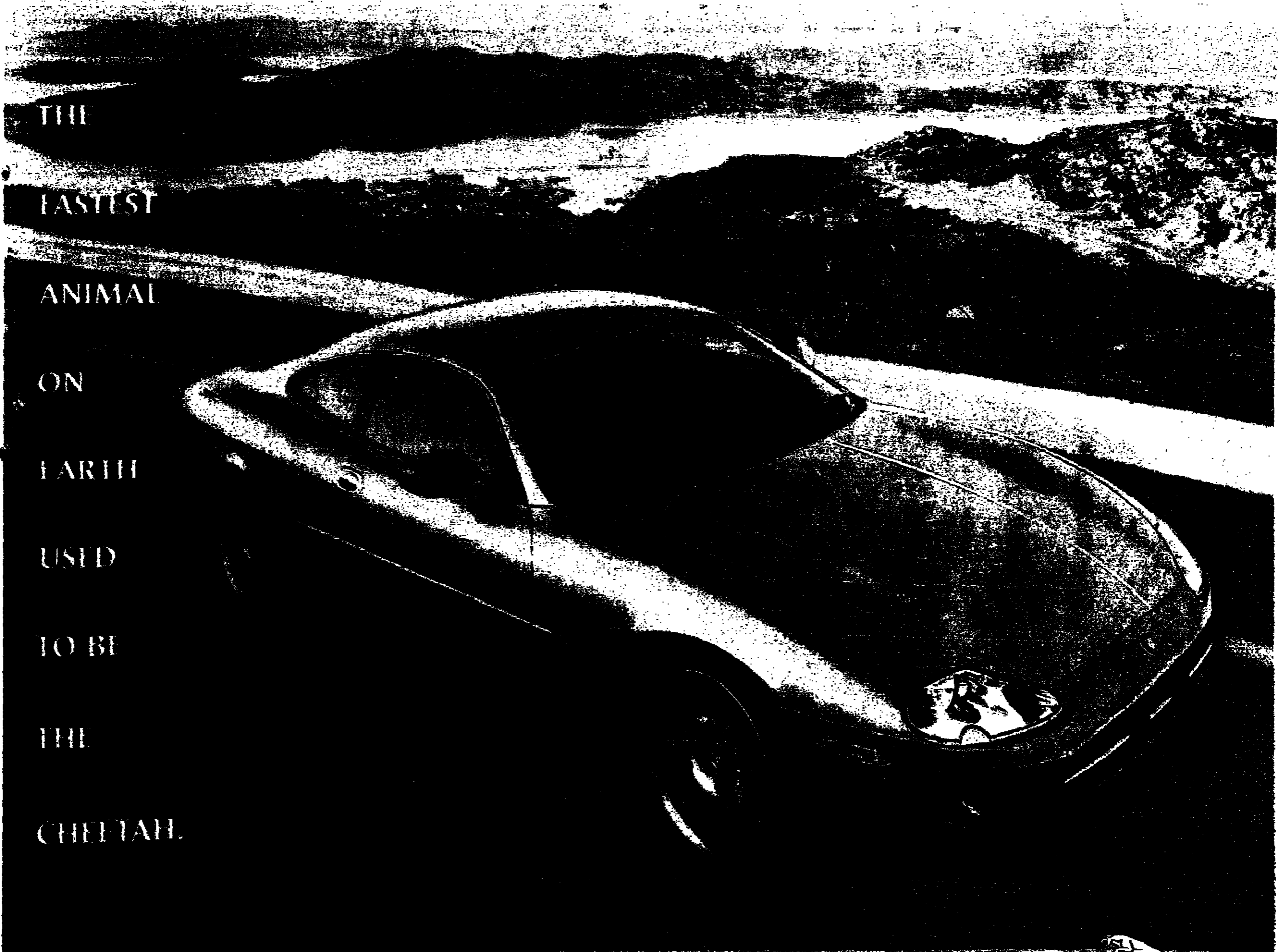
The University for Industry

will cater mainly for the increasing number of small firms that cannot meet all the training needs of their workforce. New technology will make specialised courses available at home or on the factory floor at limited cost.

Critics said that £175 was too little to buy effective training. But the Department for Education and Employment gave as examples an A Level in accountancy, a City and Guilds electronics course or a package including an introduction to word processing, and an eight-week course on accounts for small businesses.

Business leaders and education organisations welcomed the plans. But John Edmonds, general secretary of the GMB, said ministers had "lost momentum" on lifelong learning. "It is an open secret that the Government will not allocate extra money to this policy."

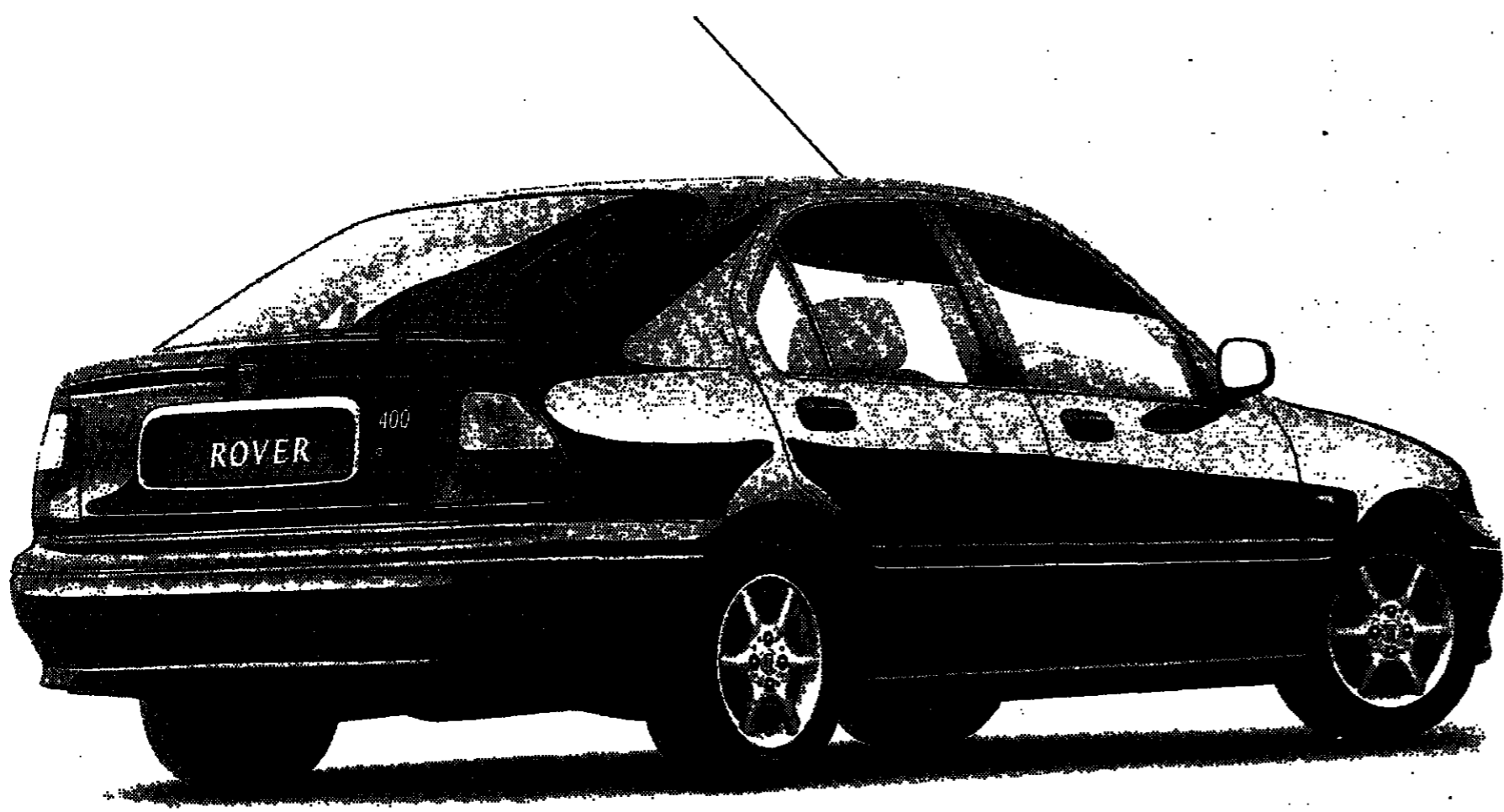
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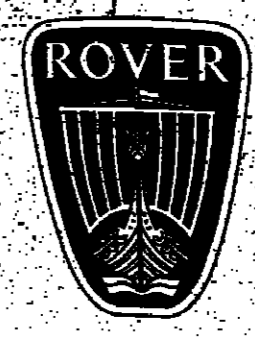


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Woman bodybuilder dies suddenly at 23

MYSTERY surrounds the death of a champion woman bodybuilder who was found dead in bed at the age of 23.

Jo Winter, who was 5ft 4in and weighed 13 stone, was recently judged the world's second strongest woman. She was so successful — beating men in powerlifting competitions — that other competitors presumed she had taken steroids. But independent tests had always proved negative, according to friends.

A post-mortem examination proved inconclusive yesterday and the results of more tests will not be known for two weeks.

Mark Parsons, a fellow bodybuilder, said: "She won everything and her feats were quite phenomenal, so people began suggesting that it was due to steroid usage. She was so determined to clear her name that she took independent tests which came out negative. She was just naturally strong and muscular. Now this speculation has begun again, but, as far as I know, she died from natural causes. This is a terrible tragedy."

Her husband, Stephen, also

Champion powerlifter had been under suspicion of steroid abuse, but tests had failed to uncover evidence, reports Joanna Bale

a bodybuilder, found his wife dead beside him when he woke up on Monday after the couple had spent an evening at the home of a friend, Graham Black.

Mr Black, 34, from Newbury, Berkshire, won the titles of Mr Europe and Britain 1996 and was a runner-up Mr Universe. In November he was arrested after police allegedly seized £3,500 worth of steroids from his home. Mr

local restaurant. Both declined to comment on her death.

Mrs Winter met her husband in July at a strongest man and woman competition in London and they married six weeks later at a church in her home town of Hereford, where they bought a house. She worked as a carer for adults with learning difficulties at a residential home near Ross-on-Wye. She regularly trained at The Factory, a gym

winning every major women's title in Britain and several abroad. She then progressed to "strongest woman" competitions, scooping dozens of prizes in powerlifting and strength events. She also played rugby for the Hereford Ladies team, for which she scored nine tries in two games before leaving with a damaged foot.

Mr Parsons, who once owned the now defunct *Muscle News* magazine as well as a shop selling bodybuilding products in Lewistown, South London, first met Mrs Winter when she was 19. He added: "She stopped competing in bodybuilding two years ago because she won everything, so she went on to powerlifting. She was at the top of her league."

In 1996, she represented Britain at a competition in Copenhagen, where she came second. In July 1997, she triumphed over male and female competitors at the UK Docklands Strongest Man challenge, winning seven of the eight events. She managed to throw a 25 kilogram tyre further than any of the men.

A Thames Valley Police spokesman said: "She went to bed happy and apparently healthy and, in the morning, she was dead. Tests are still being carried out and the death is not being treated as suspicious."



Jo Winter with her husband, Stephen, whom she met at a bodybuilding contest

Food for making a meal of pressure

By Ian Murray

FORGET chocolates, alcohol or nursery food — people with too much on their plate turn to meat or cheese for comfort, a new survey claims.

Men under stress among the teachers and nurses who took part in the research ate an average 45 per cent more red meat. Women became no more carnivorous.

Cheese consumption was up 18 per cent among those of both sexes who said that the foods they chose were dictated by moods. Fast-food meals increased by 37 per cent under stress — presumably because they leave more time for worrying.

Those with a sweet tooth among the 44 people who bothered to complete the survey said they ate no more sweets than usual, although people who did not usually touch them started under pressure. Increased alcohol use was marginal, and only among those who drank to relieve stress anyway, said researchers from St George's Hospital medical school in London and University College London in the *British Journal of Health Psychology*.

Gascoigne fan fined for prank

By Gillian Hargis

A TEENAGER who broke into Paul Gascoigne's former country retreat and made a video of himself frolicking in the swimming pool was fined £250 yesterday, despite the Rangers and England footballer's plea that no action be taken.

Walter McQueen, 17, from Ardrossan, North Ayrshire, told Paisley Sheriff Court that he entered the "outhouse" at Gascoigne's £450,000 home in Kilbarhan, Renfrewshire, last June to use the swimming pool and the sauna. Pictures of his antics later appeared in the *Daily Record*.

McQueen, a Rangers supporter, said the incident was meant as a prank. He allegedly broke into the swimming pool with two friends who have yet to appear in court.

Charlie McCusker, for the defence, said his client, "a big Gazza fan", had visited the property before and found no difficulty in gaining entry to the pool, 50 yards from the house. Lesley Thomson, de-



Paul Gascoigne

pute fiscal, told Sheriff Bill Dunlop that the alleged intruders had damaged the pool by half-draining it and had broken a perspex panel.

In a statement, Gascoigne, who has since sold the house, said he would be happy if charges were dropped, describing the incident as "youthful exuberance".

Sheriff Dunlop, however, said that Gascoigne's view was unusual and McQueen should be punished.

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Blair gives order for new central powerbase

Valerie Elliott on strengthening the Cabinet Office's grip on Whitehall

TONY BLAIR is planning to create a government powerbase to rival the Treasury and drive through new Labour policies, it was confirmed yesterday.

The Prime Minister has instructed Sir Richard Wilson, the Cabinet Secretary, to prepare for Downing Street to take direct control of the government machine. Mr Blair wants to improve the co-ordination between departments and to ensure that his policies are effectively and efficiently implemented.

His precise terms of reference are in a document obtained by *The Times* which makes clear that he wants "better support" as chairman of the Cabinet and Minister for the Civil Service. Mr Blair has set up a Monday morning policy meeting with Sir Richard, the deputy secretaries from the Cabinet Secretariat, Jonathan Powell, his chief of staff, and David Milliband, his No 10 policy director, but he has to ensure that departments act on their decisions.

The broad plan is for a revamped Cabinet Office under the helm of a senior Cabinet minister to take a strong grip on Whitehall. Sir Richard, who is head of the home Civil Service, started

work on the project two weeks ago and is reviewing the whole structure and role of the Cabinet Office, No 10 and the Office of Public Service. He has been asked to look specifically at the organisation of the departments and the deployment of resources.

One option may be to hive off a number of Cabinet Office responsibilities to other departments. Policy on regulations, for example, could easily be returned to the Department of Trade and Industry, and civil service pay could revert to the Treasury. This would free the strengthened Cabinet Office to concentrate on Mr Blair's agenda.

The project has aroused strong opposition from the Treasury and is seen as an attempt by Mr Blair to keep a rein on the Chancellor, Gordon Brown. One senior minister said yesterday: "This small, elite department at the core of Government will become Mr Blair's praetorian guard. But it will not become a Prime Minister's department and there is strength in it remaining neutral. There must always be room for a minister to appeal directly to Mr Blair to settle a dispute."

Officials will chase ministers and civil servants in other

departments on the formulation of policy and its implementation. They will also act as troubleshooters for the Government, moving in when things are going wrong, and playing a peacemaking role in any "turf wars".

One option being considered is that Cabinet Office staff will work more closely with the No 10 policy unit, especially on longer-term strategy. A Whitehall source said that since the election the policy unit had been preoccupied "firefighting" on policy but that Mr Blair wanted a strategic view for the future.

The change at the heart of Government is considered all

the more urgent because David Clark, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, is finalising ideas for his White Paper on better government, due to be published by the summer. He has offered his views to Sir Richard and believes that the Cabinet Office should be the driving force for delivering reform in the public services. But Dr Clark has recognised that the success of what he calls "joined-up government" will be for a strong central department to break the Whitehall fiefdoms and ensure that information is shared.

Mr Blair and his close colleagues are also anxious that the work of the social exclusion unit should, where necessary, influence changes in policy. He believes that departments will respond only if there is a strong push from the centre. The new powerbase, however, will work only if ministers recognise that the department is operating under the Prime Minister's direct authority. One government source said: "The Cabinet Minister will have to have standing. His job will be to persuade colleagues. He won't be using a sledgehammer — his job will be to go in with a scalpel."



Wilson: in charge of Blair's new scheme

RIDDELL ON POLITICS

Treasury is the key to Cabinet Office review

DO NOT believe the stories about all power now being centralised in 10 Downing Street. Tony Blair has found how hard it is to provide a strategic direction to Whitehall. There is a big distinction between a presidential style and controlling all the levers of power. Hence, the current review by Sir Richard Wilson, the new Cabinet Secretary.

Before the election, Mr Blair's advisers examined how to strengthen the "centre". This has led to the expansion of the Downing Street policy unit; the appointments of Peter Mandelson as Minister without Portfolio and personal troubleshooter and of Jonathan Powell as Downing Street chief of staff; the formation of a strategic communications unit to aid presentation; and the creation of a number of cross-departmental committees and task forces.

The aim has been both to improve co-ordination and implementation and to address issues, such as social exclusion and youth justice, which cut across departmental boundaries. Civil servants emphasise the role of task forces in bringing in outside advice. This is a step towards the creation of ministerial

cabinets on the Continental model, as well as breaking down departmental barriers.

But there are still problems. The Blair circle is worried that the "centre" is still not strong enough to drive forward the Government's agenda. David Clark, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, has been looking at ways of improving implementation as part of his work on the "better government" White Paper. He has floated the idea of a strategic management board, in parallel with the policy unit and communications unit, to ensure a common approach across Whitehall on issues such as deregulation, efficiency, information technology and the delivery of services to the public.

The key to the Wilson review is the Treasury. Several of Mr Blair's advisers have been concerned about the ability of the Treasury to

control the domestic agenda and on some issues to exclude 10 Downing Street until the last minute. Mr Blair has wanted to put relations with the Treasury on a more formal, structured basis. There has also been skirmishing over the Treasury's eagerness to take over some functions from the Cabinet Office.

Ministers and officials are wary of a Prime Minister's department named as such, not least because it would feed stories about Downing Street centralisation. More likely is a beefing up of the Cabinet Office to work closely with the Downing Street policy unit as the main driving force of the Blair agenda. There are two main questions. First, should some of the public service side be hived off? This option is resisted by Dr Clark who favours more of a public service department. Secondly, should there be a Cabinet

minister as, in effect, Mr Blair's enforcer, similar to Mr Mandelson's present role? But that may not be compatible with the more neutral public service role and being in charge of the freedom of information, legislation next winter.

There is a strong case for strengthening the central machinery in this way. But that should not undermine collective discussion. Admittedly, weekly Cabinet meetings have been relegated just to keeping ministers informed on the main issue of the moment, though Mr Blair privately accepts the need to make them longer. Since Christmas, they have tended to last 30 to 45 minutes rather than less than half an hour. Collective responsibility will not withstand the inevitable rough periods unless ministers have their say. Mr Blair was careful to do this over Iraq, and will need to do so again on welfare reform.

The Cabinet has long since ceased to be a decision-making body, and even its committees matter only occasionally, but it still provides essential political insurance for any Prime Minister.

PETER RIDDELL

Labour poll slip offers Tories little comfort

By Peter Riddell

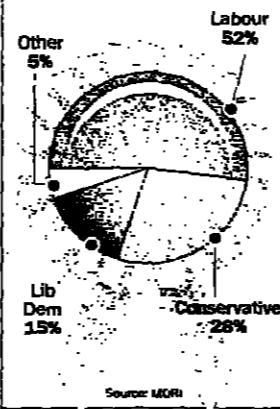
THE public is becoming more dissatisfied with the Government but there are few signs yet of any sustained recovery in support for the Tories, according to the latest MORI poll for *The Times*.

The poll, undertaken last weekend, indicates that support for Labour has slipped slightly for the fourth successive month and now stands at 52 per cent, down two points since January. This is still much higher than the Tories ever enjoyed ten months after their election victories. At present, the Tories are on 28 per cent, unchanged over the past month. The Liberal Democrats have picked up one point to stand on 15 per cent.

Dissatisfaction with the Government has doubled since last autumn to 43 per cent, virtually the same as the number who are satisfied. However, this balance is better than the Tories achieved in 18 years in office, apart from a few months after their election victories. Labour supporters are satisfied with the Government by three to one.

Tory strategists know they

face a long haul and have drawn comfort from a series of recent victories in local council by-elections. William Hague's personal approval rating has started to improve from its previous very low levels. The index, measuring those satisfied minus those dissatisfied with his performance, has improved from minus 34 points in November to minus 19 points now. Among Tory supporters, his rating has improved over the same per-



iod from minus 24 points to minus 5 points.

Mr Hague's ratings are, however, still much worse than those of the other two main party leaders. Tony Blair's rating is declining slowly from its sky high levels of last autumn. His net rating now stands at plus 29 points, half the level of last September. There has, however, been a much smaller decline in his net rating among Labour supporters, from plus 85 points last September to plus 69 points now, despite rumblings in the party over welfare reform and cuts in benefits. More than four fifths of Labour supporters, and three fifths of the public, approve of the way he is doing his job as Prime Minister.

Paddy Ashdown is, on balance, the most popular party leader. His net rating is plus 39 points among the public as a whole, and plus 84 points among Lib Dem supporters.

MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,792 adults at 164 sampling points across Britain on February 20-23. Voting intention figures exclude those who would not vote (10 per cent), are undecided (6 per cent) or who refused to say (1 per cent).

Lib Dems call for £50,000 gift limit

DONATIONS of more than £50,000 to political parties should be outlawed, the Liberal Democrats said yesterday (Polly Newton writes).

The proposal forms part of their submission to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, chaired by Lord Neill, which is considering political funding. The Lib Dems say that their preferred limit of £50,000 in any one year should apply to companies and to individuals. They argue that any organisation which wants to give money to a political party should have the explicit consent of its members or shareholders.

Lord Razzall, the Liberal Democrats' treasurer, denied being motivated by envy of the other parties' stronger financial support and said a limit was the only way to combat sleaze.

IN PARLIAMENT

TODAY in the Commons, education and employment questions, European Parliamentary Elections Bill, Devon and Cornwall local government settlement. In the Lords: Life Peerages of Commercial Dubs (Interest) Bill, Teaching and Higher Education Bill, disability benefit.

Blair defends Irvine in refit row

By James Landale

TONY BLAIR sought to defuse the row over the lavish refurbishment of the Lord Chancellor's official residence yesterday by insisting that Tory peers had supported plans for the work.

The Prime Minister told the Commons that Tory peers sitting on the Lords administration and works sub-committee had not opposed the £650,000 renovation plans when they were considered last July. His remarks came after *The Times* published a leaked letter that revealed Lord Irvine of Lairg's close involvement in the refurbishment plans months before they were approved by the Lords.

The letter from Lord Irvine to Black Rod, the chief official in the Lords, disclosed that the minister had consulted art and historical experts about the renovation within weeks of Labour's election victory. The July 1 letter came a week before the sub-committee unanimously agreed the proposals on July 8. The Tory peers on the 15-strong committee are Lord Colwyn, Earl Gowrie, Baroness Rawlings, Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn and Lord Strathclyde.

At Prime Minister's Questions, John Wilkinson, Tory MP for Ruislip

Northwood, compared a letter to *The Times* in which a magistrate complained about financial cuts suffered by the courts with the Lord Chancellor's leaked letter. He asked Mr Blair: "Which do you think the British public believes addresses better the problems that confront the British legal system?" Mr Blair said: "That wasn't a very wise intervention since, as I understand it, the House of Lords committee that approved these particular things have Conservative peers on it who fully supported it."

Leading article, page 21

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IRAQ

Iraqis reject reinspection of sites

Baghdad wants a reward before it has been put to the test, write Michael Theodoulou and James Bone

PROBLEMS surfaced in the peace deal with Iraq yesterday when Baghdad said it would resist return visits to presidential sites where inspectors had already failed to find concealed weapons. At the same time, Iraq insisted it could be trusted to "keep its side of the bargain, and called on American and British forces to withdraw from the Gulf."

Demanding a reward before Iraq has been put to the test, Tariq Aziz, the Deputy Prime Minister, said: "It is time for them to think wisely and to withdraw their forces and let the region live in calm and peace."

Diplomacy, he claimed, rather than the threat of force, had secured the success of the mission by Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General.

Washington and London have made clear their mistrust of President Saddam Hussein and indicated that their forces in the Gulf will remain to ensure he honours the weapons inspection deal signed in Baghdad on Monday by Mr Aziz and Mr Annan.

Mr Aziz urged Mr Annan to send in inspectors "as urgently as possible" so that sanctions could be lifted. "We give them our word and want them to do it," he said.

However, in an interview with Iraqi television, Mr Aziz added that there would be "resistance from us and all the fair nations of the world" if the UN weapons inspectors asked to revisit a site where they had already failed to find any banned weapons. The agreement, which calls on Mr

Annan to designate ambassadors and UN experts to visit the palaces, stipulates "unconditional and unrestricted access" to the sites.

Observers said Mr Aziz's remarks may have been bluster for a domestic audience. In a separate interview with Associated Press television, he said: "We have no problems of how many times they come."

It also emerged that while the deal preserves the integrity of Unscorn, the United Nations Commission on Disarming Iraq, its members, whom Mr Annan has reportedly referred to as "cowboys", will be instructed to improve their manners. Some inspectors, Americans and those with military backgrounds, were arrogant and rode roughshod over Iraqi sensitivities, diplomats in Baghdad said.

Locals were nicknamed "SIPs", an acronym for "suffering Iraqi people", and international aid workers were sometimes abusively referred to as "bunny huggers" because they were deemed too sympathetic to the Iraqis.

"They see us as naive idealists and themselves as hardcore defenders of the free world," said one UN humanitarian worker. Some Iraqis in turn refer to the inspectors as "UN-scum".

The agreement addresses these concerns by stating that Unscorn "undertakes to respect the legitimate concerns of Iraq relating to national security, sovereignty and dignity". At a press conference in Baghdad on Monday, Mr Annan said: "We need to be



As tensions ease in Israel, a woman soldier, relaxing with her comrades in Tel Aviv yesterday, "plays" her M16 rifle like a guitar

sensitive to the concerns of others, we need to understand other cultures."

Back at UN headquarters, the major powers were at odds yesterday over a British proposal for a new resolution authorising a military response if Iraq breaks the agreement. British diplomats planned to table a draft resolution threatening "serious consequences" — or equivalent language — if Baghdad does

not keep its promise.

Britain and the US were hoping for a vote within days to set the stage for a quick test of Saddam's good faith by weapons inspectors. But Russia was insisting there was no need for another resolution, and France said there should be no automatic authorisation for the use of force. Both are veto-bearing permanent members of the 15-nation Security Council.

As the diplomatic horse-trading got under way, British officials suggested that Iraq could expect the "severest consequences" if it continued to block UN weapons inspections. Three of the five permanent members made clear they considered such obstruction a "material breach" of the Gulf War ceasefire which could justify renewed military action. "If Iraq steps out of line, it should not expect to get a manuscript letter in an

ocean-liner taking three weeks," one official said.

Mr Annan spent the day at home. But aides said he was working on putting together the special group of diplomats and Unscorn inspectors who will check the Iraqi sites. Johan Molander, a Swedish disarmament expert on Unscorn's 21-member advisory board, was considered the leading candidate to head the special groups.

Security Council before his trip to Baghdad warned that Iraq could expect the "severest consequences" if it continued to block UN weapons inspections. Three of the five permanent members made clear they considered such obstruction a "material breach" of the Gulf War ceasefire which could justify renewed military action. "If Iraq steps out of line, it should not expect to get a manuscript letter in an

Mossad hit by fresh claim of bungling

FROM CHRISTOPHER WALKER IN JERUSALEM

MOSSAD, Israel's troubled espionage agency, was plunged further into crisis yesterday with the disclosure that it has recently botched another secret operation, in addition to September's failed poisoning of an Islamic militant in Jordan.

Coming only 24 hours after the resignation of Danny Yatom, the Mossad chief, the fresh scandal has dismayed many Israelis, who feel unable to rely on the long arm of Mossad to defend their security as they have so often in the past. Yaelit Aharonov, the Tel Aviv paper that broke the news, said that details of the operation "are not allowed to be published at this stage". All Israeli journalists are subject to supervision by the military censor, who can suppress any story he deems breaches national security.

The paper said that Mr Yatom wrote his resignation letter by hand rather than having it typed for fear of a leak. "The situation has reached such a low point that the head of Israel's secret intelligence agency cannot as-

ISRAEL

sure himself of secrecy within his own organisation," it added.

Nahum Barnea and Shimon Shiffer, correspondents noted for their intelligence contacts, said that the latest bungle was not related to the September 25 bid to poison Khaled Meshal, political chief of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, and was not the main reason for Mr Yatom's resignation, "but it made a difference".

It was unclear how much longer the censor would be able to prevent details of the new scandal being published abroad. Foreign correspondents are also subject to military censorship, but Israeli reporters often leak banned stories to news organisations abroad and then follow them up after publication.

A senior security source told Israel radio that Binyamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister, would pick a new chief spy-master within a week, so that the huge task of reorganising the agency and reviving morale can begin. "Mossad's problem is not only who will sit at the top," said Yossi Melman, an intelligence analyst. "The agency needs a serious shake-up, structural changes, a redefinition of its mission — and especially better control and supervision."

American spies in the sky keep watch on regime

ON THE LOOK-OUT FOR IRAQI CHEATING

US Air Force U2R spy planes operating from 70,000-90,000ft. take high resolution pictures.

US Keyhole KH11 spy satellites pass 600 miles above Iraq regularly photographing key sites.

US Navy E3A Shadow aircraft, based on carriers, operate at maximum 34,000ft. accumulating up on Iraqi military radio signals from Saudi, Iraqi border.

KEY SITES IN IRAQ

- Chemical weapons
- Biological weapons
- Palaces (suspected sites)

BY MICHAEL EVANS DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

AMERICAN electronic "eyes and ears" will be watching and listening over Iraq to ensure that President Saddam Hussein does not seek to exploit the new written agreement on weapons inspections signed by Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General, and Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister.

Three layers of sophisticated airborne surveillance systems will maintain a daily patrol over the country to try to detect any sign of cheating or evasion on the ground: Keyhole KH11 photographic reconnaissance satellites orbiting at an altitude of about 660 miles; US Air Force U2R spy planes operating from a maximum of 90,000ft; and US Navy E3A "Shadow" Viking aircraft which can eavesdrop on military radio signals from 34,000ft.

One problem for the Americans is that the Iraqis have become used to spy satellites and, with the help of tracking systems, have been able to cover up suspected weapons sites. The U2Rs have also been operating daily and can be seen on a clear day from the ground.

SURVEILLANCE

However, the satellites and the U2Rs have caught out the Iraqis in the past and if the new inspection agreement proves to have loopholes, allowing weapons to be removed before the arrival of UN inspectors, Saddam will know that he still runs the risk of having his evasion tactics photographed from the skies.

The E3A Shadows are electronic surveillance planes modified by Lockheed to eavesdrop on military communications. Sixteen S3 Vikings were converted from their original role of anti-submarine warfare. All their weapons were removed and their empty bays filled with electronics systems.

Where the satellites and U2Rs fail to catch the Iraqis, the Shadows, which are carrier-borne and operate from the Saudi/Iraqi border, might succeed in snatching a vital military radio message and warning the UN inspectors of evasion tactics.

Although the text of the "memorandum of understanding between the United Nations and the Republic of Iraq", covering all future arms inspec-

INSPECTIONS

tions, honours the fundamental principles demanded by the five permanent members of the Security Council, there are two issues still to be resolved which are causing concern.

Senior UN diplomats in New York are worried that two of the clauses in the agreement retain ambiguities which could prove to be loopholes in an otherwise satisfactory agreement.

One UN source said that Clause 2, which commits the weapons inspectors to "respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq", appeared to contradict Clause 1, which underlines Iraq's obligation "to co-operate fully" with the UN Special Commission (Unscorn) and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The main paragraph causing concern in Washington and London is Clause 4b, which refers to "special detailed procedures" for inspections of the eight presidential palaces. The agreement is for Unscorn inspectors to be accompanied by senior diplomats and headed by a commissioner appointed by Mr Annan.

The danger, the UN source said, was that elaborate arrangements would give plenty of warning to the Iraqis that a suspect presidential site was about to be checked.

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US spent \$600m on forces in Gulf

BY OUR FOREIGN STAFF

THE deployment of the US force in the Gulf has cost "well over \$600 million" (£363 million) since November when the showdown over UN arms inspection in Iraq began, a Pentagon official said yesterday, John Hamre, Deputy Defence Secretary, added: "But that's just basically actions to date. It's going to be more than that."

The deployment of British forces to the Gulf cost an extra £2.5 million up to the beginning of this month.

US forces in the Gulf have grown since November to nearly 34,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, more than 400 military aircraft and 20 warships including two aircraft carriers. Washington has made clear it intends to keep the force in place for the foreseeable future.

How much extra funding the Pentagon will seek to cover the costs depends on the outcome of policy discussions now under way, Mr Hamre said. "Are we going to base this force in the region for the rest of the fiscal year? Are we going to mobilise some for 120 days or are we going to cut it short? There are big policy issues that are under discussion right now that are really going to determine that, and I don't know the answers to that yet," he said. Hamre's cost estimate is over what the Pentagon would normally spend to operate the ships, aircraft and units deployed.

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Moscow arsenal 'held anthrax'

A DEFECTOR from the Soviet biological weapons programme has admitted for the first time that the Kremlin considered preparing hundreds of tons of anthrax bacteria as part of its Cold War plans for a superpower confrontation.

Kanatjan Alibekov, a high-level researcher who defected to the United States in 1992, said the Russian military still had its programme in place in 1991, a year after President Gorbachev ordered its cessation. Now a private consultant, Dr Alibekov has written a highly classified study of the Soviet biological weapons programme for the US Government.

In an interview with *The New York Times* yesterday, he said he believed a vestige of the biological programme still existed under the guise of defensive research, despite a further cancellation by President Yeltsin in 1992 and the official Moscow line that it remains defunct. "They continue to do research to develop new biological agents; they conduct research and explain it as being for defensive purposes," he said. "We can say that Russia continues its military in this area to maintain its military biological potential. They keep safe

Defector says Russia still has biological weapons facility,

Tom Rhodes writes

their personnel, their scientific knowledge. And they still have production capability."

During his time as second-in-command of one biological branch, he said, the system included the preparation of anthrax and plague virus cultures that could have been delivered by intercontinental ballistic missile warheads at several days' notice in the 1980s.

The United States officially cancelled its own biological programme nearly 30 years ago, but continues to engage in defensive research. Dr Alibekov said the Soviet Union had not believed Washington and so continued to pursue a secret arms race.

By 1989, the Soviet programme dwarfed that of America, according to Bill Patrick, the CIA agent who debriefed Dr Alibekov on his arrival

in New York. Mr Patrick said: "It scared the hell out of me when I first talked to this fellow. If we produced a pound of anything, they produced 100 to 500."

Dr Alibekov, who was appearing on American network television last night, said he had decided to speak publicly to fight the spread of biological weapons and to seek absolution for taking part in their creation. There also seemed no coincidence in his decision to break his silence so soon after the Iraqi crisis appeared to have dissipated and as Washington required strong backing for keeping an allied military presence in the Gulf.

He gave a startling account of the 1979 incident at Sverdlovsk, in which a cloud of anthrax was released into the atmosphere from a Soviet weapons plant, and he blamed Boris Yeltsin, then the local Communist Party chief, for its cover-up. Dr Alibekov said almost everyone in "the footprint" of the cloud later died. US experts believe the death toll was much less — only 62 people have officially been confirmed as killed — and claim the KGB, rather than the future Russian President, was responsible for hushing up the incident.



A Greek soldier walks away from his burning truck in Athens yesterday after demonstrating students set it ablaze with a petrol bomb. Another soldier was injured and taken to hospital with

Attack by Athens anarchists

minor burns (John Carr writes). The truck was passing Athens University law school, where what

police described as about 30 anarchists had joined striking teachers opposing planned education reforms in a protest march to the parliament. One of the extremists was seen to throw the home-made bomb. Youths also set fire to a car belonging to the university rector.

First legal brothel opens in Zurich

FROM ASSOCIATED PRESS IN ZURICH

SWITZERLAND'S first legal brothel opened its doors yesterday with several bookings. Although the 30-room Petite Fleur was only half-full on its first day, manager Hans-Berthold said he considered it a success because the establishment only started advertising last week.

The Petite Fleur, situated in a three-storey building in the Zurich suburb of Wollishofen, is to be staffed only by prostitutes who do not pay their trade tax the streets.

It has its own security guards and does not itself employ the prostitutes. They hire a room for Swfr200 (E8), a night.

In October 1992, brothels were legalised in Switzerland. The opening of the Petite Fleur comes after more than three years of legal and financial obstacles which threatened to block the project.

Valentin Landmann, the brothel's owner and a lawyer, said it would be used by "independent and intelligent women". He added that it was open to both women and men. They would be free in "what they do and how much they work," he said.



Lord Hurd: security at tourist sites impressive

Hurd team says Egypt sites safe

SECURITY at Egypt's main tourist sites is now "appropriate and often impressive", according to a report submitted to the Cairo Government by Lord Hurd of Westwell, the former Foreign Secretary (Michael Binyon writes).

After a rapid visit to Egypt's main tourist destinations, including the Sphinx and the Pyramids, the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and Luxor, Lord Hurd and two other former statesmen from America and Italy concluded that Egypt had taken wide-ranging and vigorous measures to ensure the safety of tourists after the massacre at Luxor in December.

CHESHIRE BUILDING SOCIETY RESULTS 1997

The Group results for 1997 are as below:

	12 months to 31 December 1997	12 months to 31 December 1996
Net Interest Receivable	26,966	28,374
Other Income	7,414	7,411
Total Income	34,370	35,785
Administrative Expenses	17,976	15,739
Provisions for Loan Losses	1,235	1,759
Profit on Ordinary Activities	15,159	18,287
Tax on Profit on Ordinary Activities	4,768	6,034
Profit for the Year	10,391	12,253
Gross Capital	127,525	127,134
Total Assets (Est)	21,887.7m	21,641.2m

- Assets grew by 15%
- Gross mortgage lending of £342m - up by 22%
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Commenting on these results Paul Hughes, Chief Executive, said "We have had a very successful year in 1997, achieving excellent growth and maintaining our strong capital position. During the year our profits have been reduced. This reduction has been quite deliberate and is the result of giving more to our members by way of better rates, lower rates and more competitive products."



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Human rights visitors baffled by silent inmates at five-star Chinese jail

FROM JAMES FRINGLES IN BEIJING

WHEN Foreign Office officials in Beijing to conduct a human rights dialogue with China were taken to inspect a prison they found that each cell had a bank of tropical fish and potted plants while an inmates' rock band was playing in a common room.

"The prison was so clean that you could have eaten your dinner

off the floor," one said yesterday. The five-star jail at Daxing, south of Beijing, had a swimming pool and billiard tables.

In the prison there was one large hall with a stage that could only be called a ballroom," he said.

"The whole prison seemed to be made from white tiles with occasional stone lions as decorations, like a bank in Hong Kong."

However, there was a certain lack of spontaneity about the

prisoners. "They were sitting in their cells staring fixedly at books. When we entered a cell, they stood up—but still stared at their books. When we tried to speak to them, they said nothing and continued gazing at their books."

The Chinese authorities said the prison held 2,000 inmates, though only about 30 were seen by the British visitors. They said prisoners were paid for their work and their families were encouraged to

visit. "Don't think all prisons in China are like this," a Chinese interpreter whispered. "Prisons in Sichuan and Qinghai [where the principal gulags are situated] are not like this at all."

"Obviously this was a model prison, a kind of Potemkin village," said the British official. "We would need to see non-model prisons in future to make sure progress was really being made."

Britain, which holds the presi-

dency of the European Union, conducted its first round of talks on improving human rights conditions, yesterday. This followed the EU's decision not to condemn China for human rights violations at the United Nations Human Rights Commission's annual meeting in Geneva next month.

Until now, the EU has always backed an annual resolution critical of the regime which crushed pro-democracy demonstrations in

Tiananmen Square in June 1989. It was split last year after some of Beijing's critics refused to sponsor the Geneva resolution. Selling Airbus to China and providing jobs in Europe seemed to outweigh human rights for countries such as France and Germany.

Yet EU officials admitted privately yesterday that they had felt "uncomfortable" when Li Peng, the Chinese Prime Minister—who ordered the tanks into Tiananmen

Square—praised the EU's decision. One said: "It made me feel uneasy."

Non-European diplomats here noted that the EU's softer line on human rights in China comes just ahead of the first EU-China summit in Britain in April.

The Hong Kong representative of Human Rights in China, Sophia Woodman, said yesterday: "These people are in prison for merely expressing their opinion."

Iran and Saudis unite to halt dip in oil price

By MICHAEL BINYON, DIPLOMATIC EDITOR

IRAN and Saudi Arabia, which have had a confrontation across the Gulf for more than a decade, have come together to try to stop the further plunge of oil prices, now lower than at any other time since the 1973 Middle East war.

In a significant thaw in the glacial relations between Riyadh and Tehran, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former President and now head of Iran's influential Expediency Council, has just ended talks with senior members of the Saudi royal family during a ten-day visit.

This, and Crown Prince Abdallah's recent attendance of the Islamic summit conference in Tehran, mark a turnaround in relations between

the two countries. Hojatoleslam Rafsanjani said the two countries were doing their best to prevent a further slide in oil prices, which have weakened after the deal between the United Nations and Iran.

"It gives us pleasure to say that there is co-ordination between the two countries and ministers and officials are doing their best to maintain the prices as they were decided by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec)," he told a press conference in Riyadh on Tuesday.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are among the world's biggest exporters of oil. Both are members of Opec, the once powerful cartel that forced a huge rise in world oil prices in the 1970s. Oil prices have

dropped to four-year lows after the 11-member Opec decided in November to raise oil output by 10 per cent to 27.5 million barrels a day.

In talks with Prince Saud al-Faisal, the Saudi Foreign Minister, Hojatoleslam Rafsanjani, who was accompanied by Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, Iran's Oil Minister, said Opec needed to set rules to deal with members who violated that oil production quotas.

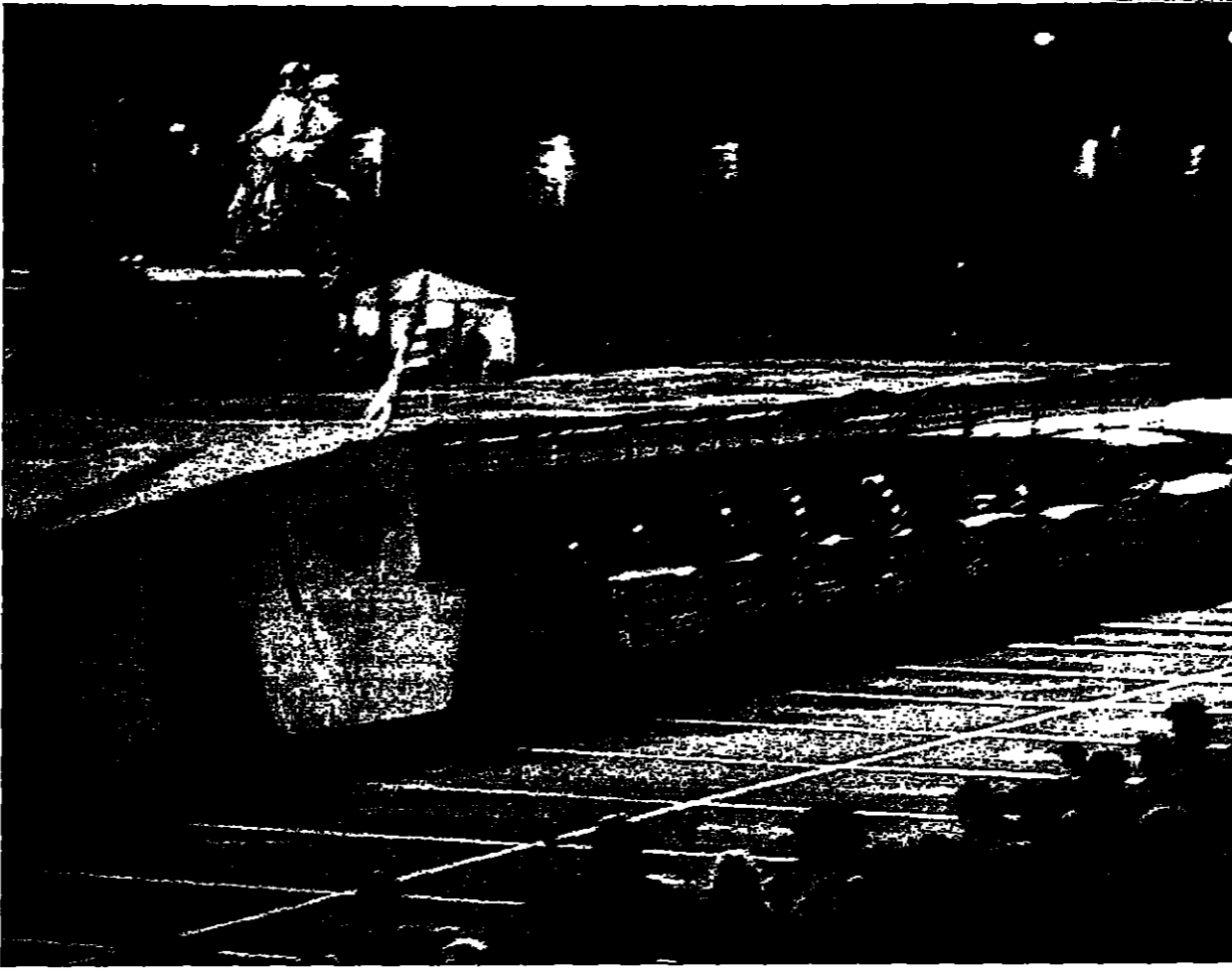
A Saudi official said that Riyadh was ready to co-operate with Iran to prevent a fall in oil prices. The two countries also discussed stability in the Gulf and ways to improve their relations, which have been at a low point since 1987 when 400 pilgrims, mostly from Iran, were killed in riots during the annual pilgrimage.

Saudi Arabia accused Iran of being behind the bombing in 1995 of the American barracks outside Dhahran in which 19 American servicemen were killed. Despite a number of arrests, no one has yet been charged.

Other Gulf states have accused Iran of stirring up trouble. Bahrain blamed Tehran for inciting demonstrations by the Shia majority and giving support to bombers.

However, Iran has recently begun to emerge from its regional isolation. Last week, before Iraq's deal with the United Nations, Muhammad al-Sabah, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, visited Tehran and was rewarded with outspoken Iranian denunciations of the American military build-up in the Gulf.

On Monday, European Union foreign ministers agreed to reopen the political dialogue with Tehran, cut off 18 months ago after the direct implication of Iran in the murder of dissident exiles in Berlin. Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, said that Europe was "willing to assist the first shoots of glasnost in Iran."



Defying gravity and common sense, Robbie Kniewel, the scion of a legendary stunting dynasty, flies into the record books with a leap over 30 limousines parked side by side at a Las Vegas hotel

Kniewel son leaps into record books (Giles Whittell writes). Robbie, the 35-year-old son of Evel Kniewel, broke his own record of 230ft in the air on a motorcycle on Tuesday night

potentially fatal leap. The older Kniewel, who retired in 1980 after suffering a crushed pelvis trying to jump the fountains outside nearby Caesar's Palace, was among the spectators.

Cameroon editor's plea for freedom

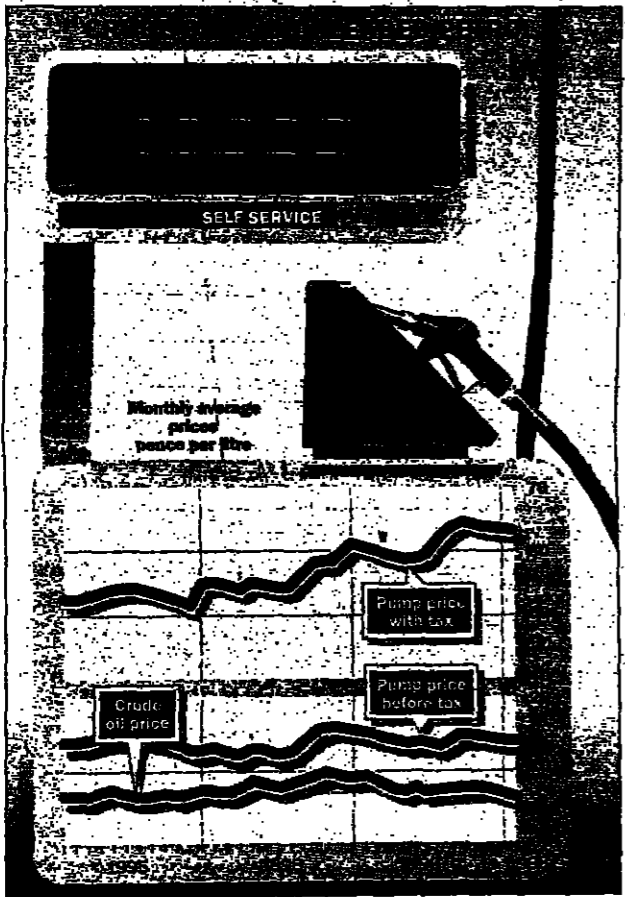
By MICHAEL BINYON

THE editor of a leading newspaper in Cameroon has appealed to the world's press to campaign for his release from prison where he was sent for two years for suggesting in an article that the country's President was ill.

In a letter smuggled to the World Press Freedom Committee from a cell in Douala Central Prison, Plus Njawa of *Le Messager* said he was arrested on Christmas eve and sentenced last month to a fine of £500 and two years jail for "spreading false news".

He wrote an article saying that President Biya, 65, arrived late at a football match on December 21 and disappeared before half-time. *Le Messager* subsequently discovered that he had suffered a cardiac incident. The Government then denied the story and had Mr Njawa jailed.

Cameroon, an amalgam of two former British and French protectorates, joined the Commonwealth in 1995, but has been accused of widespread abuses of human rights, in particular by the francophone majority of the anglophone minority.

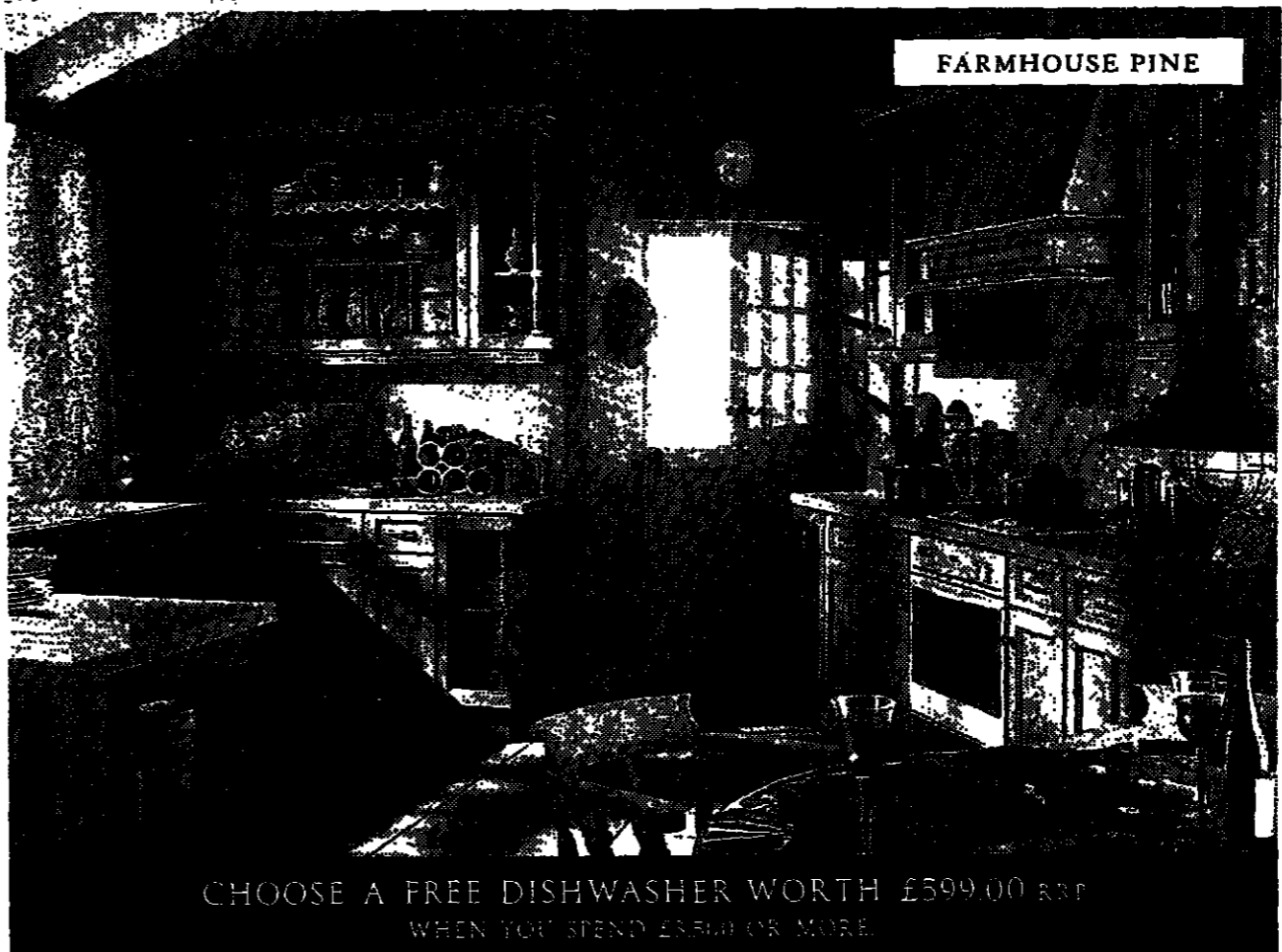


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America fails test on maths and science

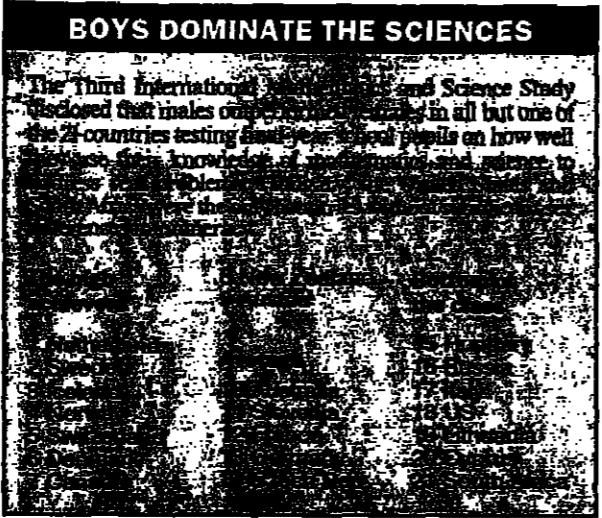
By **Pauline Ross**
in Washington

AN INTERNATIONAL test of education standards has found American high-school seniors to be among the industrial world's worst in mathematics and science.

The most comprehensive and rigorous comparison of schooling yet undertaken presented the most damning assessment of American students in their last year of mandatory schooling, prompting educators and leading politicians, including President Clinton, to call for a complete re-examination of the country's teaching system.

In both subjects for which the country has long been proud, American students ranked close to last among the 21 participating nations — which did not include Britain — and their scores were worse than those earned by American elementary and middle-school pupils in similar international examinations during the past two years.

Even the scores of academically successful pupils, those who take either physics or advanced mathematics in high school, proved deeply disappointing. The test found the country scored worse in



BOYS DOMINATE THE SCIENCES
The Third International Mathematics and Science Study disclosed that males outperformed females in all but one of the 21 countries testing students on how well they understood science.

studies by the centre, children at elementary school were above average in mathematics and near the top in science. By middle school, however, that figure had already declined.

Mr Schmidt said American students were rarely taught algebra, geometry, chemistry and physics in their middle-school years while other countries, particularly those in northern Europe and Asia, taught the subjects in greater depth as students progressed through school. Only 14 per cent of students in their last year at high school studied physics, the report discovered.

"We lay such a weak foundation in mathematics and science during the middle-school years," Mr Schmidt said.

Richard Riley, the Education Secretary, described the results as "unacceptable" and said they offered compelling evidence to support the Administration's call for voluntary national tests in mathematics for middle-school pupils.

Mr Clinton, who has long claimed education as a pillar of his White House, immediately blamed the system, citing the success of younger students as adequate reason for better performance by their elders.

"There is no excuse for this. There is something wrong with the system we are using," he said. "Fourth-graders represent the same socio-economic diversity as the older students. I do not believe these kids cannot learn. I am tired of seeing children patronised because they happen to be poor or from different cultural backgrounds than the majority. That is not true."

A report on the test, which was supervised by the Education Department and other government departments around the world, gave no conclusive reason for the desultory American outcome.

But researchers said that school curriculums seemed stronger in other countries and Americans apparently spend less time completing their homework than most of their international peers, choosing instead either to work while at school or concentrate too heavily on extra-curricular activities.

Mandela's pledge to open the door of learning rings hollow

FROM R. W. JOHNSON IN JOHANNESBURG

SOUTH AFRICA'S school system is in a state of unprecedented crisis. The new academic year has started with many schools finding they have no textbooks at all.

This would be bad enough on its own — poor black children cannot afford such books and rely on the schools to provide them — but the situation is compounded by the simultaneous attempt by the Education Ministry, against all prudent warnings, to introduce an entirely new outcomes-based curriculum.

President Mandela's Government which came to power pledging "that the doors of learning shall be thrown open", is wringing its hands at

scenes of school chaos and dismay unparalleled even under apartheid. It is true that the Education Ministry is renowned for incompetence and the teachers' union for mindless militancy, but the nine provincial governments, which have in most cases simply consumed their education budgets and have nothing left for books.

A large part of the problem derives from the fact that African teachers — the most numerous and vocal section of the black intelligentsia and a key element in the ANC's coalition — exercised enormous pressure for salary increases in 1990-94, badly supported by the ANC. F.W. de Klerk, then President, well aware that he was soon to hand over power, conceded every demand leading to an extraordinary inflation of teachers' salaries.

Teachers' salaries are still absorbing more than 90 per cent of the education budget with less than 10 per cent left for school buildings, maintenance and books. The crazy result is that South Africa has one of the highest expenditure per capita figures for education anywhere in the world, but still has an extremely weak system. The Government, despite its pledge to cut public spending, is now forced to find emergency funds to try to rescue the situation.

Briton dies as storm washes hill away

FROM GILES WHITTELL
IN LOS ANGELES

BULLDOZERS were clearing mud and debris yesterday left by a landslide south of Los Angeles that killed a young British man and brought the death toll from California's latest storm to at least seven.

Glen Flook, 25, died when saturated hillsides above the home where he was staying in the resort of Laguna Beach gave way before dawn on Tuesday, sending a wave of mud through a built-up canyon. He was found in a wall of wreckage near a house where neighbours said he had been seeking refuge.



Two police officers died after the Cuyama River flooded across Highway 166

Mr Flook, originally from Essex, had been on holiday in California with his girlfriend, according to police. As officials told his parents, other casualties of the winter's most brutal El Niño storm so far were being mourned across the state.

Two police officers were killed when their car vanished into a hole gouged by the raging Cuyama River 100 miles north of Los Angeles. The river cut away a 700ft stretch of road, leaving a chasm into which Britt Irvine and Rick Stovall, of the California Highway Patrol, were swept in their car while answering a call for help from a stranded truck driver. His lorry was swept half a mile downstream before a helicopter plucked him from the roof of his cab.

A motorist died in a 13-car pile-up on one of dozens of flooded roads in Central Valley, and the crew of a light aircraft were feared dead after its tail was found sticking out of a snowdrift in the blizzard-stricken San Bernardino Mountains.

Nine people were injured in the Laguna Beach landslide, despite a frantic pre-dawn rescue effort. Among those who escaped were Eldon Setherholm, 74, who said he "ended up doing

breaststroke in the mud", and Tiffany Serbia, a nine-month-old baby thrown from her mother's arms and rescued floating face down through the canyon.

The rain let up on Tuesday but powerful winds continued to pummel the coast. Two small tornadoes, virtually unheard of in California, blew ashore in Long Beach and Huntington Beach, cutting power supplies.

President Clinton was expected to release federal loans and grants for emergency rebuilding, as the cost of winter storm damage rose to \$500 million (£300 million) and the number of homeowners seeking financial help exceeded 9,000. Meteorologists have forecast a ten-day drying-out period for most of California, but have given warning that this year's El Niño effect could generate similar storms until early summer.

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سكوا من الاصل

How the Princess has done us a service

Each year one hundred thousand people in the United Kingdom suffer a first stroke. The majority pass unnoticed except by the patients, their families and friends. Strokes are the third most common cause of death in the Western world, and the incidence is even higher in Afro-Caribbean races.



As Princess Margaret recovers from a mild stroke, Dr Thomas Stuttford reports on what causes them, the latest treatment and what we can do to minimise the risk of having one

Unwittingly and regrettably, Princess Margaret has done medicine a service by drawing attention to strokes and to the medical problems that create changes in the circulation which too often lead to calamity.

A few years ago an American physician said that since the treatment of high blood pressure had become so efficient, having a stroke was largely optional. He was exaggerating to make his point. Reducing blood pressure and treating diabetes, raised cholesterol levels and obesity will cut the incidence of strokes but, unfortunately, it will not eradicate them.

The American was also comparing Britain unfavourably with the United States, where regular medical examinations enable doctors to monitor their patients' blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar. They can also chivy them about weight, diet, exercise and smoking, all factors which make a stroke likely.

Although the treatment of blood pressure has improved, it is estimated that even now, only 25 per cent of those people who need treatment for hypertension (high blood pressure) receive it in adequate doses.

The stroke is defined in medical language as a vascular event in the brain, which causes abnormalities in neuro-logical function and lasts for

more than 24 hours. In lay terms, this means that a blood vessel in the brain has either bled, or been blocked by an embolus or thrombus (clots), and that the brain tissue on the far side of the damaged vessel has been starved of the necessary oxygen and other nutrients.

Survival of brain tissue is dependent on a constant flow of blood. Although nerve cells consume oxygen at a great rate, they unfortunately have no method by which to store it. Within minutes of the supply being cut, the patients suffer damage to their grey cells, which rapidly die. If the damage caused to the brain tissue is still detectable 24 hours after an attack has begun, the episode is described as a stroke.

Doctors tend not to talk about strokes but about CVAs, or cerebral

vascular accidents. Strokes are either ischaemic from clots (75-85 per cent), or haemorrhagic from bleeding (15-25 per cent). In an ischaemic stroke the brain suffers an infarction, which means the destruction of tissue due to lack of oxygen.

Princess Margaret's stroke, which mercifully seems to have been mild, may be seen in retrospect as a warning. Interestingly, it came on in the evening during a social event and, it is reported, was associated with severe headache and dizziness. These symptoms would favour a diagnosis of a haemorrhagic stroke — a bleed — rather than one from a clot.

It is important that the distinction is made between an haemorrhagic and an ischaemic stroke as soon as possible. It is said that the first 24 hours after a stroke are the most important time in its treatment. The rate at which the damage is done is maximal in the first six hours, and most strokes are "complete" within 48 hours. During the first day the amount of brain damage continues to extend for com-

plex biochemical reasons, including the increasing acidity of the injured brain tissue and pressure caused by tissue swelling (oedema).

Sometimes an ischaemic stroke will extend over several days.

An assessment of the patient's long-term outlook can usually be made after a week, but it is an unwise doctor who is too dogmatic when predicting the future.

If after a week no significant neurological damage can be detected, the stroke is described as "minor".

Twenty per cent of those patients admitted to hospital die within a month. Fifty per cent of patients are left with only minor signs, and 30 per cent suffer serious inconvenience.

Scanning, preferably with an MRI scan, or if not with a CT scan, is the most certain way of making an accurate diagnosis.

If the stroke is the result of a clot, anticoagulation with aspirin or a similar substance is needed.

However, if these same preparations are given to the patient who is bleeding, the slow leak from a blood vessel may well turn into a torrent, which means that even more of the brain tissue will be destroyed by the escaping blood.

The first-aid measure after a stroke is to ascertain that the heart rate is regular. If the rhythm has been disrupted, it will need to be restored to normal.

A markedly irregular heart action, such as that found in atrial fibrillation, is a common cause of emboli, or small clots, which are carried from some distant part of the body in the circulation until they lodge in a cerebral artery.



The Princess on Mustique in happier times



Princess Margaret's symptoms point to a haemorrhagic stroke rather than one from a clot

PRINCESS MARGARET, like others who have had a stroke, will have to forswear cigarettes and restrict her alcohol intake to the recommended two or three drinks a day.

No to nicotine, yes to an occasional drink

The effect of alcohol is more complex. Small quantities — two or three drinks a day — decrease the coagulability of the blood, lessen the likelihood of atheroma forming and reduce the incidence of ischaemic strokes. On the other hand, too much alcohol raises blood pressure and

increases the likelihood of developing a dangerous cardiac arrhythmia.

Binge drinking, possibly as little as six drinks, increases the likelihood of a stroke because of its effect on blood pressure, the heart rate and the way blood clots. A survey in Sweden showed that after a heavy night's drinking of red wine it was the haemorrhagic stroke rate that went up. Alcohol is an anti-coagulant, and red wine is the most efficient anti-coagulant of all drinks.

Treatment can prevent other types of attack

NO discussion of strokes is complete without consideration of transient ischaemic attacks (TIAs). These are characterised by loss of some cerebral function, manifested, for instance, by a transient weakness or loss of vision. This lasts for no more than a matter of minutes or hours before total recovery. By definition the attack must have cleared within 24 hours.

TIAs are the result of small emboli, clots, which have been stuck for a time in a cerebral artery before being borne away into the wider circulation.

Measures against strokes also reduce the likelihood of having a TIA. As these measures have improved, so has TIA ceased to be the harbinger of gloom it was until recently. A few years ago a patient who had a TIA had one chance in six of suffering a major stroke within five years, and one chance in four that they would suffer either a fatal heart attack or a stroke.

A patient who has had a TIA still needs a thorough cardiovascular examination and, like those who have had a stroke, should have appropriate tests to assess their carotid arteries. Their blood pressure should be taken on both arms so as to exclude narrowing of the subclavian artery, the blood vessel at the base of the neck behind the collarbone.

Stroke watch goes on

PRINCESS Margaret's doctors, like those treating any stroke victim, will continue with their investigations even when the acute episode is over. In younger patients, if the cause of the stroke was haemorrhagic, the cerebral arteries would have to be examined so as to rule out aneurysms. However, 85 per cent of strokes occur, as in the Princess's case, in the over-65s.

to make certain that there is no other lesion, such as a tumour within the brain, into which bleeding might have occurred. If the stroke is caused by the carotid and subclavian arteries, which carry the blood to the brain, are narrowed by fatty deposits of atheroma, pieces may break off and block a cerebral artery.

Older patients need to have their blood pressure checked at least four times a day. If high, treatment that reduces by 40 per cent the risk of a second stroke will be prescribed. Twenty-one per cent of later strokes result from failure to control blood pressure. Blood pressure tends to rise as the patient ages and the walls of the arteries become less elastic. The blood pressure reading within the arteries, should be under 140/90. A 160/95 reading would cause anxiety, although random testing shows that 5 per cent of men and women over 65 have blood pressures greater than 200/100. The risk of a stroke rises after the diastolic blood pressure, the lower reading obtained when the heart is at rest, rises above 95, very steeply once it is over 105. The stroke rate increases by a factor of four when the diastolic reading rises from 105 to 110. Possible reasons for high blood pressure, including kidney disease, need to be excluded.

After a stroke, patients have blood tests to exclude diabetes, which is associated with an increased incidence, to make certain that cholesterol levels are normal. Sometimes blood tests will also uncover faults in the clotting systems, which could make haemorrhage more likely. The heart rhythm is also checked and other tests are made to exclude valvular disease and inflammation of the heart muscle.

After a haemorrhagic stroke, it is routine

After a stroke, patients have blood tests to exclude diabetes, which is associated with an increased incidence, to make certain that cholesterol levels are normal. Sometimes blood tests will also uncover faults in the clotting systems, which could make haemorrhage more likely. The heart rhythm is also checked and other tests are made to exclude valvular disease and inflammation of the heart muscle. Symptomatic treatment, the giving of anticoagulants to lessen the likelihood of a second stroke can be invaluable, so long as the patient's doctors are certain that she/he did not initially suffer from a haemorrhagic stroke. A European study of more than 6,600 stroke victims compared the influence of aspirin to the preparation Persantin. Retard dipyridamol, when taken separately and when taken together, on the second stroke rate. Taken separately, aspirin reduced the second stroke rate by 18 per cent and Persantin by 16.3 per cent. When taken together, the stroke rate fell by 37 per cent.

Blood tests sometimes uncover faults in the clotting systems

Keep an eye on cholesterol

THE argument continues over the value of estimating cholesterol levels. Reducing the overall amount of cholesterol, in particular the low-density lipoprotein fraction, is of undoubted value to those at risk of cardiovascular disease.

Evidence is overwhelming that this reduction lessens the likelihood of coronary thrombosis, but the jury is still out on the effect of this measure on those who have had, or are likely to have, a stroke.

Lowering the cholesterol levels of stroke victims is, however, always recommended. Salt intake should also be reduced, and no salt should be added while cooking, or at the table.

The recommendations on who should take statin drugs to assist in lowering blood cholesterol levels are constantly being extended. The present advice is that it is undesirable to have a total cholesterol level of more than 5.2 mmol/L, and for low-density lipoprotein levels to be less than 3.5 mmol/L

for anyone who has multiple risk factors of cardiovascular disease. The LDL level should not be more than four for those without risk factors. Those with total cholesterol levels of more than 5.2 but below 6.5 should lose weight and take less cholesterol and more fibre. Those with levels of more than 6.5 but below 7.8 should have a thorough change of diet, but if this fails they should take one of the statin drugs.

For those above 7.8, nearly all will need a statin drug to lower their cholesterol level. There is no licence at the moment for the use of statins to prevent strokes but Lipostat and Zocor are licensed for lowering cholesterol levels to reduce heart attacks.

With or without drugs, a change of regime, with more exercise and a greater emphasis on vegetables and fruit, will also help. Weight must also be strictly controlled in any stroke victim.

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جريدة الرياض

Norm's theory of natural selection

ROBERT GALLAGHER

American magazine owner Norm Zadeh is happy to lose millions in his crusade for women with 'all natural' breasts. Interview by Giles Whittell

Norm Zadeh doesn't have a problem with a weightlifter. She looked terrific, clothed as well as naked. The difficulty came from the faint lines that ran down the outside of her breasts. They were the only sign that she might have had implants, which Norm dislikes.

I don't like the way implants look, or the way they feel!

and I just feel they should not have to turn on the TV and see an unnatural-looking woman getting all the attention by virtue of having subjected her body to all kinds of horrible operations and health hazards," he says.



Norm Zadeh, bosom buddy: "Women shouldn't have to turn on the TV and see an unnatural-looking woman getting all the attention by virtue of having subjected her body to horrible operations"

He arranged for the woman to be inspected by a female colleague. He studied pictures of her rolling around on the floor of a photographer's studio. She looked natural enough. But still those faint lines left room for doubt, if not for silicone. So he gave her \$300 (£188) to be checked out by a plastic surgeon and certified as implant-free.

Whether the market is on Norm's side is another matter, however. As a business venture, *Perfect 10* is plucky to the point of nuts. So far it has no advertising, partly because he won't accept any from alcohol or tobacco companies. It has no American distributor because "for some reason all the top distributors in the US said this magazine is not going to sell".

Norm Zadeh, pronounced Zay-duh, is a likeable, laconic chap without much hair but with at least some awareness of what you might call cutting-edge breast issues. He considers himself something of a crusader.

Norm Zadeh, pronounced Zay-duh, is a likeable, laconic chap without much hair but with at least some awareness of what you might call cutting-edge breast issues. He considers himself something of a crusader.

The curse of the Spice Boys

The Spice Girls are riding high but soccer's Spice Boys are not faring as well, says Jason Cowley

As the Spice Girls begin their first tour with five muscular male accessories instantly dubbed the Spice Boys, it is worth noting that this moniker already has ominous resonances.

Step forward five members of the Liverpool football squad: all handsome, talented, wealthy and spectacularly marketable. Spectacularly unlucky, too, in the place where it matters most on the pitch.



Stan Collymore: dropped



Jamie Redknapp: injured

weeks ago he broke his leg just as his relationship with Sparty Spice became public. Out for the rest of the season, Stan Collymore, recently sold to Aston Villa, seems unable

to score goals. Dropped from the England squad. At least he had a night out with Ulrika at the Brit awards. David James is now known among fans as Jesse James: one shot and

you're dead. Liverpool have recently bought a new goalkeeper. Dropped from England squad. Then there is Jamie Redknapp, who seems to suffer a serious injury whenever he plays for England. Now out of the Liverpool first team, injured.

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Except, that is, when someone tries to sneak some implants past him. Would-be *Perfect 10* models are checked under their arms, under their breasts and round their nipples — the most common places to find scars from augmentation operations. But just in case a masterly surgeon should slip a clause promising to repay the entire \$15,000 cost of their photo shoot if found out later.

The origins of the cult of the Merseyside Spice Boys can be traced back to the 1996 FA Cup final against Manchester United, when the entire Liverpool squad arrived at Wembley in bespoke white Armani suits. In contrast, Alex Ferguson's men wore sombre club blazers, and looked ready for action — indeed, like a football team.

Then there are the professional assignments: James seems to spend more time on the catwalk and in the pages of *GQ* than between the sticks; McAteer advertises Wash 'n' Go shampoo; Redknapp, Fowler and Collymore model clothes. Yet this lowering of celebrity has occurred at a time when the careers of the Spice Boys have spun into spectacular reverse.

ARTS

New movies reviewed by Geoff Brown: Steven Spielberg puts on his serious hat for *Amistad*, his new film about the slave trade, plus *The Edge*, a lost-in-the-wilderness movie by David Mamet Pages 34-37

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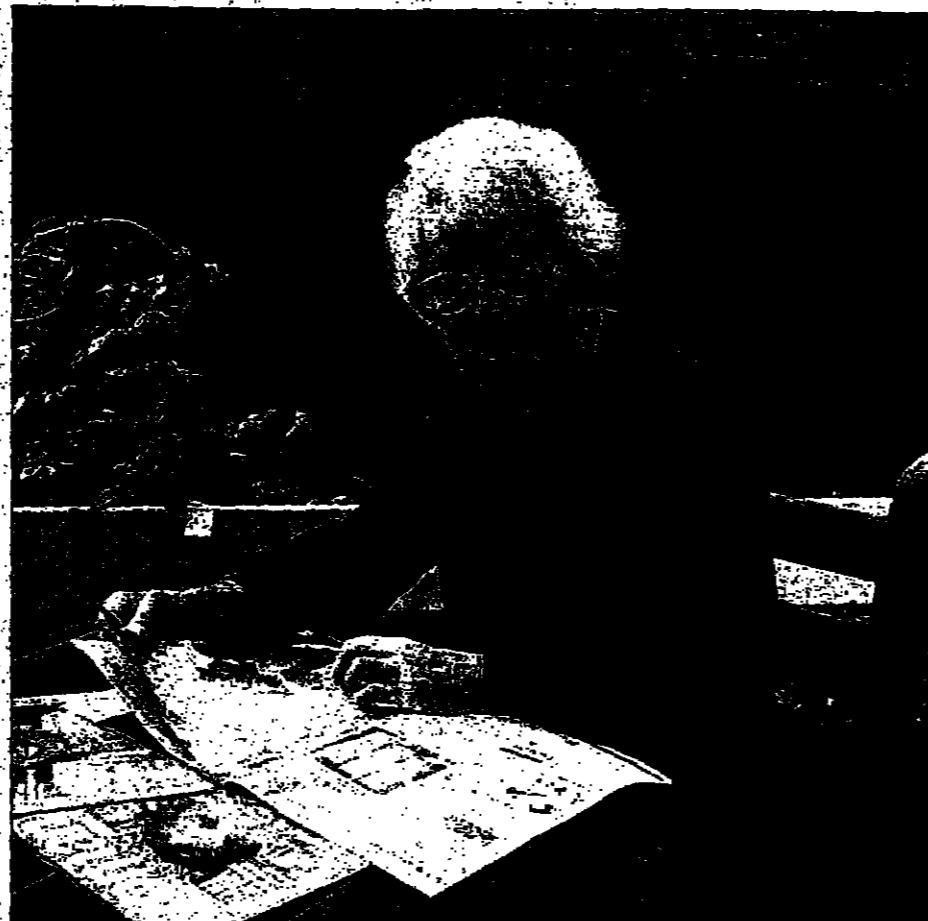
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OBITUARIES

MARY GRIEVE

Mary Grieve, OBE. Editor of Woman, 1940-63, died on February 19, aged 91. She was born on April 11, 1906.

As editor of Woman for 23 years, Mary Grieve built up the world's biggest women's weekly, which at one time claimed to reach half of British women between 16 and 45; and certainly made — and makes — substantial profits.



against the mooted female conscription, eventually persuading the ministry that women were contributing by holding families and communities together, and that men who were fighting for their wives and children would be demoralised if they thought their homes were being broken up.

Woman was launched by Odhams Press in July 1937, following an American pattern, as the first British weekly printed by colour gravure. Its 64 pages cost 2d. Although it aimed for half a million readers, its early issues contained remarkably solumn pieces, such as Beverley Nichols on child labour and Edith Summerskill advocating a welfare state.

Woman had become a flagship for Odhams women's magazines, with its circulation well ahead of its stable-mates Woman's Own, Woman's Day, Woman's Realm, Modern Woman and Everywoman. But in 1961 Odhams, the largest periodical publisher in the country (it also owned the Daily Herald, The People and Country Life) was taken over for £38 million after a controversial battle by Daily Mirror Newspapers (known after the merger as the International Publishing Corporation).

HENNY YOUNGMAN

Henny Youngman, American comedian, died in New York on February 24 aged 91. He was born in London on March 16, 1906.



THE real proof of Henny Youngman's gift as a comedian was not to be found in any of the 1,600 or so jokes he penned in his lifetime, but in their delivery. Never stopping to draw breath between gags, he tossed off his trademark one-liners with timing that might have been inspired by a machinegun.

Youngman was indefatigable, covering tens of thousands of miles a year in engagements, playing venues as diverse as the London Palladium and bar mitzvahs in Atlantic City. He performed 200 shows a year well into his seventies and kept his number listed in the Manhattan telephone book so that anyone could call and book him for an appearance.

Youngman was nothing if not enterprising. He was the first comic to join the telephone service Dial-A-Joke, attracting three million calls in his first month. He wrote several books, including his autobiography and collections such as Insults for Everyone (1979) and Take My Jokes Please! (1983). In his last years he kept up his grueling tour schedule, but developed a sit-down version of his stand-up act. His comic style was captured in Martin Scorsese's 1990 film Goodfellas, in which he portrayed a stand-up comic entertaining gangsters, based on his own experiences.

GEORGE MALE



George Male, Arsenal and England international footballer, died on February 19 aged 87. He was born on May 8, 1910.

GEORGE MALE was the last surviving member of the great Arsenal side of the 1930s, assembled by Herbert Chapman, which shifted the geographical balance of success in English football. When Arsenal won the old first division in 1930-31 they were the first club from the south to triumph since the inception of the league in 1888.

at the age of 38, earned an FA Cup winner's medal and made 19 international appearances. Only the advent of the Second World War, when Male was 29 and at his peak, prevented the accumulation of more caps and, in all probability, further domestic honours.

Male privately held reservations when Chapman revealed at the start of the 1932-33 campaign that he intended to convert him from wing-half to full-back. It proved a masterstroke. Male became the cornerstone of the defence as Arsenal won the first of three titles in successive days.



PERSONAL COLUMN containing sections for Overseas Travel, Flights Directory, UK Holidays, Winter Sports, Antiques & Collectables, Flatshare, and Announcements.

30FT SNOWDRIFTS IN THE NORTH ON THIS DAY February 26, 1955. A double-deck bus skidded in the snow and crashed onto its side at Bramote, Nottinghamshire. It crushed the offside of a parked car, and the occupant, Mr. T.R. Lovell, of Borrowash, near Derby, was taken to hospital with head injuries.

LIVUS

NEWS

Minister did not list directorship

Geoffrey Robinson, the Paymaster General, faces a Commons disciplinary inquiry for failing to declare a lucrative directorship in the register of members' interests for at least three years.

Tiger mauls Chipperfield worker

A Chipperfield Circus worker's arm was bitten off and eaten by a tiger at the family's winter quarters in Oxfordshire. The man, who has not been named, had been feeding the tiger from outside the cage when the animal lunged for his arm and severed it just below the elbow.

Princess 'better'

Princess Margaret was preparing to fly home from the Caribbean as Buckingham Palace reported that she was making steady progress after suffering a slight stroke.

Beef exemptions

The European Commission bowed to pressure from Germany, the US and other countries and announced plans to exempt them from measures to ban beef on the bone.

Countryside deal

The Prime Minister was accused of caving in to landowners after he declared his support for a voluntary deal to give people access to acres of moorland, mountains and heath.

Compensation battle

A battle for compensation running to many millions of pounds will follow the inquest verdict that Matthew Harding, the vice-chairman of Chelsea Football Club, died accidentally.

Gambling addicts

The lottery regulator will today demand that Camelot clamps down on illegal scratchcard sales as research shows that children are becoming addicts.

Blair accused

A mother whose daughter is to lose her assisted place at an independent girls' school accused Tony Blair of breaking a pre-election pledge.

Lone parent cash

Gordon Brown has bowed to backbencher pressure on lone parent benefit cuts and agreed to extra cash payments for all families to help with child care costs.

Anthrax plan

A defector from the Soviet biological weapons programme has admitted that the Kremlin considered preparing hundreds of tons of anthrax bacteria as part of its Cold War plans.

Pop opposition

New Labour's love affair with the pop world cooled a few more degrees when Damon Albarn, lead singer of Blur, launched a scathing attack.

Oil price crisis

Iran and Saudi Arabia, which have had a confrontation across the Gulf for more than a decade, have come together to try to stop the oil price plunge.

Archers 'death'

After unprecedented BBC hype, The Archers suffered another dramatic character loss with the death of John Archer in an agricultural accident.

Worst maths mark

An international test of education standards has found American high-school seniors to be among the industrial world's worst in maths and science.

Grave of the ghostly dog of Ham

For two hundred years visitors to the Jacobean Ham House in Richmond, Surrey, have reported sightings of a ghostly spaniel. Horace Walpole is the first to record the house's ghostly inhabitants including the first Countess and Duchess of Lauderdale. Now researchers have discovered the remains of a small dog during excavations of the orangery.



One of the 6,000 US servicemen in Kuwait guarding a bunker at the Al Salam air force base near Kuwait City. Page 13

Insurance: Commercial Union and General Accident are to merge in a £15 billion deal. The new company will be called CGU and will shed 5,000 of the existing 53,000 jobs in the two groups. Page 25

Knee injury: Robbie Fowler's run of misfortune continued when it became clear that he had ruptured his cruciate knee ligament, the worst type of injury that can beset a footballer. Page 48

Park view: Threatened with closure just four years ago, the Serpentine Gallery raised the money for a thorough facelift. Richard Cork admires the results. Page 34

Strokes: Dr Thomas Sturtford reports on what causes strokes, their treatment and what we can do to minimise the risk. Page 18

Prudential: The insurance giant is poised to abandon commission based pay in an effort to reform in the wake of the pensions mis-selling scandal. Page 25

New manager: Aston Villa have appointed John Gregory, of Wycolmbe Wanderers, to succeed Brian Little. Gregory was formerly Little's assistant. Page 48

Slave labour: Steven Spielberg brings on the heavy stylistic artillery for his worthy epic on slavery, Amistad; the week's new films are reviewed by Geoff Brown. Page 35

Rude boy: Benedict Nightingale goes north for West Yorkshire Playhouse's staging of the violent yet sentimental new play by Irvine 'Trainspotting' Welsh. Page 37

Cricket: Alec Stewart, who five years ago was Michael Atherton's rival for the England captaincy, is playing the best cricket of his life in the West Indies. Page 46

Tennis: Andrew Richardson reached the second round of the Guardian Direct Cup at Battersea Park when Marc Rosset retired during the second set. Page 45

Enchanted: Melvyn Bragg's new book enchants Lisa Jardine; Peter Stothard on ancient images of love-making; Howard Davies baits the bulls and bears of Wall Street; Antonia Fraser admires Peter Ackroyd's Thomas More; Marianne Wiggins is bored by an attention-seeker. Pages 38, 39

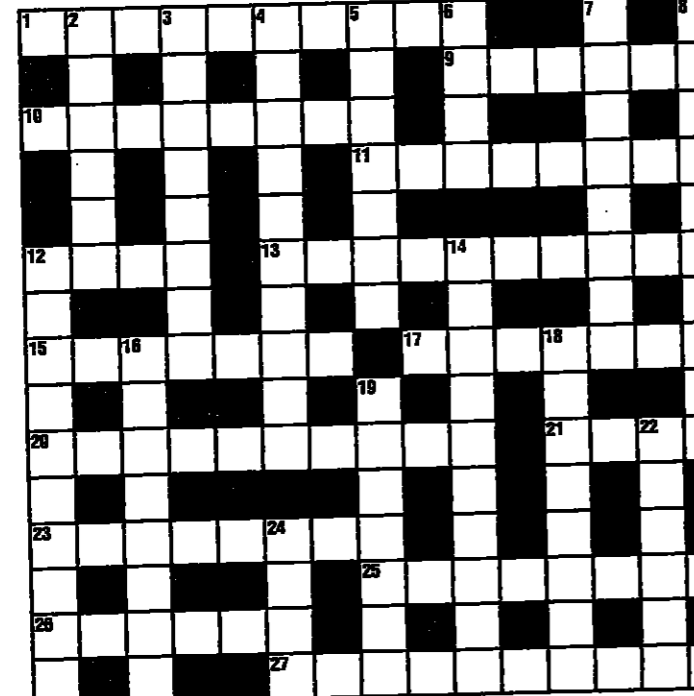
Open letter: 'Help the poor taxpayers...' A leading accountant writes to the Chancellor. Page 30

The Arabs on the street have realised that you can say no to the United States and remain alive. The major calamity here is the apathy of our leadership toward the erosion of the power of Israel's most important strategic asset - the United States. - Haaretz, Israel

Table with columns for location, temperature, and weather conditions. Includes sections for 'AROUND BRITAIN YESTERDAY' and 'ABROAD'.

Weather forecast section featuring a map of the British Isles with weather icons, a weather gauge, and a detailed forecast for various UK cities.

THE TIMES CROSSWORD NO 20,725



- Crossword clues: Across: 1 Change the last bit of clothing in struggle to last (10), 9 Swear on Bible purse has no money (6), 10 Will not become involved in nude review - it's not customary (8), 11 The House of Commons is unrivalled (8), 12 Women's group very acceptable to Muslim ruler (4), 13 Very popular gal with leather that's kinky (3,3,4), 15 Being up late after telling stories is wearing (5,2), 17 Merciful old Pope (7), 20 Artificial intelligence? (10), 21 Sleeps around to maximum extent (4), Down: 23 Foolishly cares woman's a good looker (8), 25 Material for wrapping comic opera's one record in (3-5), 26 One said to be leaving city (6), 27 Bad feeling about temporary home put on record (10), Down: 2 A bit of body language (6), 3 The devil of an election process over there (8), 4 Hurry, as Penelope had to? (3,7), 5 Little creature, a morsel to perch? (7), 6 New prayer for part of church (4), 7 Apply, in standard English, for fighter's body (8), 8 English writer who was initially Greek, briefly (10), 12 Man is on notice he should stick at his task (10), 14 Commotion as shell lands on a bear in the jungle (10), 16 Devotee - one joining party subsequently (8), 18 Let diamonds, for example, fall into the wrong hands? (8), 19 Fully occupy quarters with well over a hundred (7), 22 Sound, for example - an expanse of water (6), 24 Firm was cheating, director at last admitted (4).

Various utility and service information sections including 'Lanes Road and weather conditions', 'Weather by Fax', 'World City Weather', 'Motoring', 'Car reports by fax', and 'Hours of Darkness'.

Newspapers Support Recycling logo and text encouraging readers to recycle newspapers.

Forecast for New Year's Eve 1999, Definitely Not Dry. Advertisement for a 66-night cruise around Africa and the Spice Islands of the Indian Ocean.

Advertisement for 'The Ice Box' featuring a large graphic and text promoting a cruise. Includes details about the ship, itinerary, and pricing.

Handwritten note: "The City 20:20"

Five years ago, going to see a British film would almost guarantee a bad night out. Productions were generally depressing, underfunded and badly written.

Distribution the key to UK film success

The future of the British film industry will depend on whether the Government makes the same mistakes that led to its collapse in the 1980s.

shrewd and ambitious film producer, Tim Bevan, and Michael Kuhn, a music industry executive with PolyGram.

writer John Hodge which produced Trainspotting. Films made in Britain are now, finally, beginning to make money.

David Aukin little choice but to make alliances with major Hollywood studios.

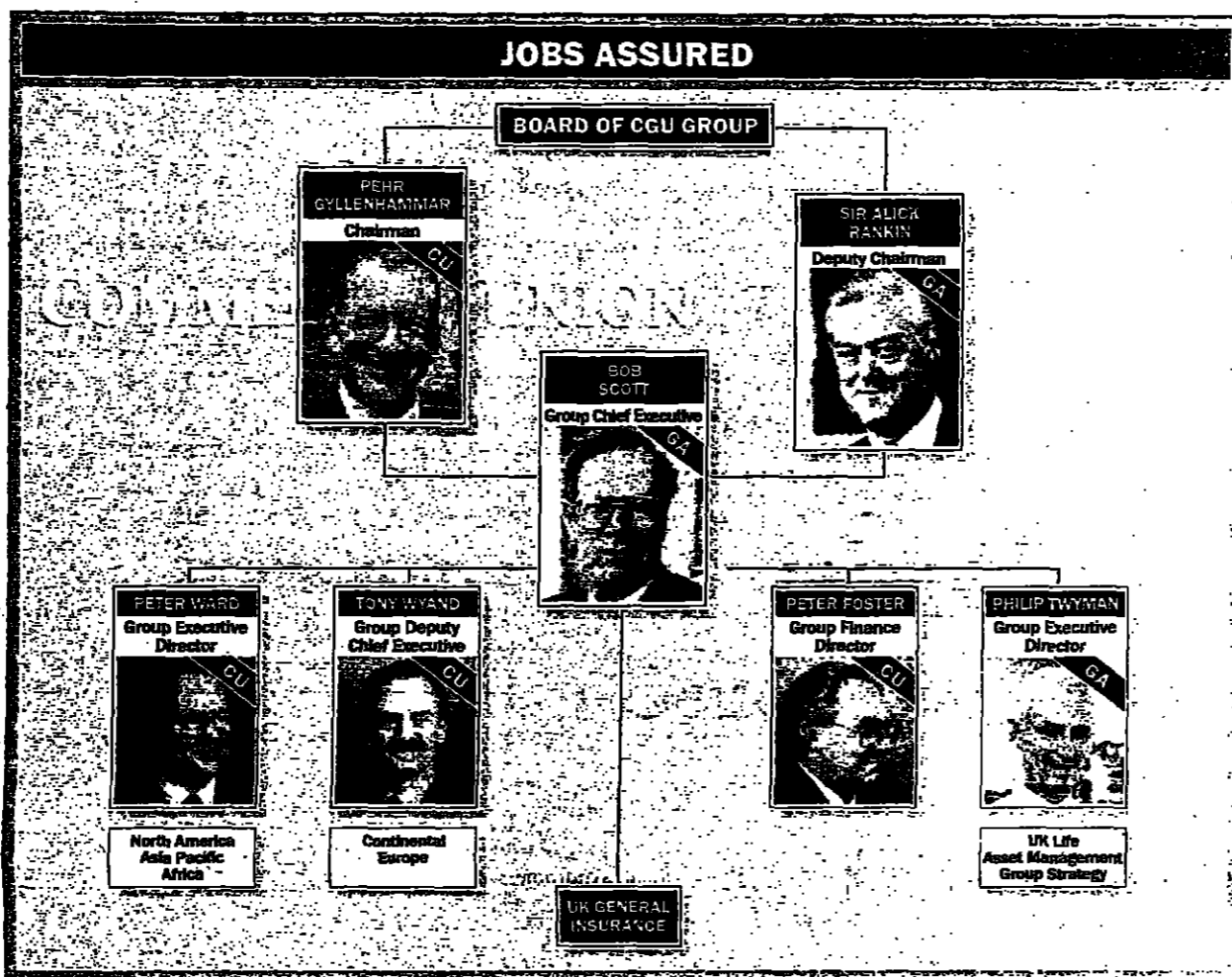
Tom Clark is predictably optimistic. The film policy review group was established to come up with an action plan to double audiences for British films.

group, predicts that cinema ticket sales will be worth £645 million in the year 2000, compared with just £450 million in 1996.

Insurers hope composite policy will bring sufficient critical mass

Size matters to architects of GA and CU merger, says Marianne Curphy

The merger of Commercial Union and General Accident will create the biggest insurer in the UK, but on a global scale the £15 billion company is small fry.



executive board during the merger process was one of the main criticisms levelled at RSA, the composite insurer created in the autumn of 1996 from the combination of Royal Insurance and Sun Alliance.

negotiations, the rationale behind the recent wave of consolidation in the industry is simple.

Both were aware that European banks and insurers were keen to go shopping in the UK, and that if they wanted to retain their independence they would need a partner.

its sophisticated computer systems and the base that it provides for expansion into Europe.

When larger groups try to raise rates, smaller ones undercut them

compete head on with the likes of Swiss Re, Munich Re and Allianz of Germany, Generali of Italy and the giant US insurers.

In this context, the merger of CU and General Accident is a defensive one, born out of a need to cut costs and survive in an industry where critical mass is achieved only if you manage hundreds of billions of pounds worth of assets.

Although analysts yesterday welcomed the concept of the marriage of two well-run companies and the prospect of £225 million cost savings, on a global scale, the £15 billion company is still relatively small in a global context.

Chaos reigns as businesses make mark on the Internet

Large companies are not known for their good-natured tolerance of trademark infringement.



Yesterday's announcement leaves RSA, with a market capitalisation of £11.6 billion, a relative minnow. Despite Guardian Royal Exchange's brave words about its strong brand and business as it published its full-year results, it is looking increasingly vulnerable with a value of just £4 billion.

com - will be created. This will allow companies with clashing names to register the same address, but with different domain names.



Roche: software initiative

Chew it over

THE MYSTERY of the dinner at Chez Nico deepens. Who said what to whom when Martin Taylor and Malcolm Williamson shared a chalet in the future of two British banks turns.

circulating is that Mr Williamson is a bit of a mentor to Mr Taylor. When the former journalist, textiles boss and Mandarin scholar became chief executive of Barclays, he is said to have asked the Standard Chartered boss for guidance on how to run a bank.



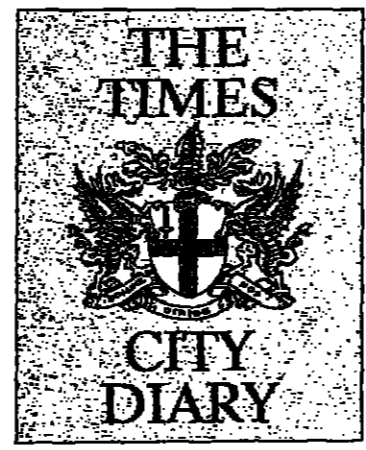
"You realise you're making a drama out of a crisis"

Pru's sorry now?

MORE FUN and games at the Pru, where I hear that Sir Peter Davis is becoming concerned about the rather high staff turnover among the insurer's direct sales force.

Tiny tonic

THE 42p jump in SmithKline Beecham's shares yesterday surely must have been prompted by the



massive vote of confidence shown in the company by its board. SB announced that three directors bought shares on Tuesday - chief executive Jan Leschly; Hugh Collum, the finance director; and Sir Christopher Hogg, a non-exec. The only problem is that the trio, who received a total of £2.9 million from SB last year, bought only ten shares among them - with a market value of just £72.20.

late and soft drinks. The BBC continues to produce The Archers. Or, more amazingly, Eurostar continues to run trains to Paris.

Song and dance

AM I the only person who is tired of hearing people moaning about the size of their bonus? Now that the "fat cat" season is upon us in the City, the place is awash with stories that so-and-so from SBC or who-the-heck from Deutsche Morgan Grenfell is unhappy with the amount that was added to their pay packet for merely doing their job.

Partisimonious payouts announced earlier this week are said to be behind the move of the building research team of Howard Seymour, Scott Fulton and Harvey Robinson from CSFB (nee BZW) to ABN Amro. They have come in the top four of all the relevant surveys for the last three years and join the wonderfully named Ricardo Barcelona, who sounds like he should be entering next year's Eurovision Song Contest.

ENL sunk

THERE are plenty of face roses at the Italian national electricity company, ENL, after it lost the contract to light up Venice. It seems the city has signed a ten-year contract with Electricité de France to provide power and new lamps for the romantic port and the neighbouring town of Mestre.



Gondoliers in Venice will ply their trade by French lamplight

Jason Nisse

Amazingly, there is no international body to solve these disputes. Many companies that rely heavily on Internet trade have found themselves fighting costly legal battles in several different countries to protect their trademarks.

Ms Roche said that a series of studies by organisations such as the DTI and the Bank of England had found many UK companies had so far failed to capitalise on the rapidly growing international software market. The initiative called the Software Business Network will involve setting up a contact directory, holding regional and national meetings, and developing management training courses.

ACCOUNTANCY

Help the poor taxpayers

An open letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer from John Andrews, president of the Chartered Institute of Taxation

Dear Chancellor, You may not recall the last time we met, but I remember it very well. You were advocating the virtues (in Opposition) of a fairer tax system and explaining what you might do when you were in government.

Things have moved on since then and I continue to hear of this Government's desire for "fair taxes".

It is too late to influence your legislative programme for the Budget on March 17, but I hope that you might have a passing mention in your Budget Speech of your particular concern for the complexity facing the poorest taxpayers in society.

Interest in this area never quite seemed to reach priority status under the previous Government. Therefore my institute decided that we should try to do something about a range of the issues confronting those who have just enough income to creep into the taxpaying class. As you will be aware, you do not need a lot of income to do that. We have become increasingly uncomfortable that the tax system has become unintelligible for those people least able to pay for advice to cope with its difficulties.

We do not mind an equal contest in debating the interpretation of tax law between the Inland Revenue and tax advisers, but it becomes one-sided when the Revenue knows the rules and the taxpayers (in this case, the disadvantaged) have no hope of understanding them.

You may consider it to be heresy to accuse that nice Hector of creating complexity or being unhelpful, but we have to look at the evidence. For example, the latest Help the Aged booklet for elderly taxpayers advises that they should forget trying to understand the tax rules that apply to them. Instead they are advised to invest in a calculator. This, together with a few helpful formulae, will then enable the elderly to decide where to invest their pitiful amounts of surplus cash in order to obtain the best safe return after tax to supplement their state or other pension.

No respectable tax system in a civilised world should require some of its least well-off and most fiscally-innocent citizens to pay for tax advice or to travel for miles to a tax office where the nature of the tax help available is unlikely to meet their needs. It is not that the tax office is likely to provide poor advice.



Brain teaser: Gordon Brown needs to simplify taxation

It is just that the Revenue is not trained or encouraged to provide financial advice; it is geared to provide tax information. There is a dramatic difference between the two. It is a little like getting lost in unfamiliar country lanes and approaching a local for advice. He can either tell you where you are (and how you might have got there) or, more helpfully, he might tell you how to get to where you want to go.

The answer is probably not to change the Revenue remit or its training because that would lead into the realm of giving tax-planning advice and I doubt that you would wish to open that particular "Pandora's Box".

We would like to see the Revenue appoint a range of individuals with a specific responsibility for certain groups

of their "customers" — the elderly, the disabled, single parents, students and those struggling at a minimum wage level with the tax rules applying to the self-employed. We would like them to look at the possibility of training others in the community who in turn could help these groups. Such schemes exist in other countries. Between us, the Chartered Institute of Taxation and the Revenue, we believe we could make a difference.

The rest of the answers are probably in your hands. Dispensing with tax reliefs that are 15 per cent of a number; harmonising the rules for the employed and self-employed; integrating tax and national insurance contributions, and so on.

That is probably enough for now. I am distracting you from putting those finishing touches to that speech. Should those touches include a reference to the underlying complexity of our tax system for the lowest paid, then rest assured that I, and my institute, will be delighted to work with you to help to search for the answers to those difficult questions.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN ANDREWS,
President, The Chartered Institute of Taxation,
12 Upper Belgrave Street,
London, SW1P 3AG.

Traditional route is key to the future

YOU might have been forgiven for thinking, these past few weeks, that the only things accountants did was run global firms, worry about investment in far-off emerging markets and collapse with relief when their grandiose plans for mergers fell foul of clients and other partners' egos.

But for every global accounting initiative there is also someone in Shropshire sorting out the local farmer's tax problem. Equally, every accountant in the largest of firms has started off by qualifying through one of the accountancy bodies' examinations. The heartland of accounting is the great unnoticed bulk of the iceberg. But just as global warming is eroding the icebergs, the market is supposedly moving away from the traditional accountants' heartland.

One of the most useful reports of recent years was produced by the English ICA. It looked at what the market for chartered accountants was likely to be in 2005 and whether the development of the profession was up to speed to meet those demands.

The draft report was published last year, but the final report has remained under wraps. This is a shame because it makes very good, reasoned reading and takes what is likely to be required for chartered accountants to prosper in the foreseeable future by the scruff of the neck and gives it a good shake. In particular, it looks at "the future of the brand". The English institute and, to a lesser extent, the Scots institute face a great problem.

As the report makes clear, "some of the brand premium associated with being a chartered accountant is being eroded as competing qualifications gain in prestige. This erosion is made worse by the proliferation of bodies — and not just the traditional accountancy bodies — entitled to use the word 'chartered' in their members' titles".

In addition, chartered accountants have been specialising more and more in their careers. The proliferation of facilities at the English institute bears witness to this. The answer, which the English institute is likely to follow, is to keep the chartered accountant qualification but add to it. People would be adding lines like "fellow in tax" after their name. But it would make their specialisms

apparent and would, as the 2005 report makes clear, protect the qualification. "If the institute does not act to certify functional specialists," it says, "there is a clear danger that other bodies will recognise their own specialists and encroach into areas that have traditionally been the preserve of chartered accountants."

The report also suggests that the idea of an institute MBA should be investigated to add to the prestige of the qualification. But it is not just prestige which is the goal. There has to be a way in which accountants can return to their roots. And that is in the way that accountants are trained.

The Scots ICA has set about trying to solve this one. It has long been valued for the fact that, even though it works to a lesser extent now, the institute and its members do the training. But if you are a small practice in a far-flung part of the highlands and islands it is increasingly difficult to justify the time and cost of having a trainee sitting in a classroom in Edinburgh. And it certainly has been doing nothing to maintain the numbers of people training to become CAs. Small firms have instead been training people for the certified accountants' exams. These have two advantages. People do not have to be graduates to embark on the exams and their study is mostly through distance learning.

Now the Scots are to follow suit. In future, for example, a school-leaver could head directly into a training contract. It would take longer than for a graduate, six years instead of three, and it would be

a throwback to the old days. The current leaders of the institute came from the era when bright young Scots went straight from school into a smallish firm and were taught the qualities and abilities required by some crusty, but wise, old mentor. If it worked for us why shouldn't it work now, has become the cry. And now it has become the reality. We can happily expect the English ICA to follow suit. The accountancy bodies might have preferred to remain a graduate-only profession, but even they have to bow to market forces, particularly if a report like that of the 2005 committee suggests that steady decline is the only alternative.



ROBERT BRUCE

Worrying gulf at the MoD

IT IS a good thing that we did not go to war in the Gulf this week. The National Audit Office's report on the progress towards the introduction of "resource accounting" by government departments makes for worrying reading. To the rest of us "resource accounting" is how normal businesses have worked for years. In Whitehall its introduction is still

seen as a bit of a novelty. And the report reveals that the Ministry of Defence, in particular, will not have the technology required in place on time. And in common with up to a quarter of Whitehall departments it "may not be able to identify and value assets and liabilities by April 1, 1998", which might be a bit of a problem if you needed some tanks pronto.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Future fudge

THE working party under former Coopers & Lybrand partner David Stewart, which produced the English ICA's report on the future for accountants in the year 2005, might be accused of not knowing where it was going. At the end of its final report, in the section suggesting that independent experts should advise

on any future futurology, it concludes that "we, as a working party, were neither sufficiently involved nor sufficiently detached".

Food for thought

THE restaurant and wine bar beneath the English ICA headquarters in Moorgate Place in the City has been renamed. On the grounds that Prue

Leith no longer has anything to do with the place it has dropped the "Leith's" name and is now called ESCA. To a generation of chartered accountants, ESCA meant the schools cricket association which organised matches where the young Ramprakashes of the future might be found essaying a sound forward defensive stroke. Sadly for them the new eatery has nothing to do with cricket. ESCA is simply Latin for food.

ROBERT BRUCE

COMMERCIAL UNION

1997 RESULTS

Operating profit £432m

	1997 Unaudited	1996 At 1997 exchange rates	1996 Audited
Total premium income	£8,539m	£7,805m	£8,242m
Operating profit before tax	£432m	£409m	£444m
Profit on ordinary activities before tax	(i) £568m	£542m	(i) £589m
Profit attributable to equity shareholders	£355m	£348m	£380m
Operating earnings per ordinary share	39.8p	40.0p	43.5p
Dividend per ordinary share	(ii) 32.5p	—	30.3p
Shareholders' funds	£4,486m	—	£3,902m

Note: (i) Includes realised investment gains before tax of £164m (1996 £164m).
(ii) The 1997 full year dividend will be paid in the form of a foreign income dividend in cash with no share dividend alternative

- Pre-tax operating profit 5% higher at constant rates of exchange
- Full year dividend increased by 7% to 32.5p
- Life profits 20% higher, with life and savings new business up 27%
- Strong increase in overseas profits offsets UK general insurance downturn
- Shareholders' funds increased by £584m to £4,486m

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Copies of the full Group accounts (or a summary Annual Review), which have not yet been reported on by the auditors, will be circulated to shareholders and delivered to the Registrar of Companies after approval at the Annual General Meeting



General Accident Record Result

1997 RESULTS	
General Premiums	4,249 4,356
Life Premiums	
Underwriting Result	(137) (201)
Investment Income	
Life Profits	132 108
Operating Profit before Taxation	687 500
Profit Attributable to Ordinary Shareholders	687 500
Operating Earnings per Ordinary Share	

- Record full year operating pre-tax profit up 21% at £511m
- Fourth quarter operating profit also at record level of £127m (1996: £110m) — the fifth consecutive record quarter
- Worldwide underwriting deficit reduced by 32% to £137m
- Profit contribution from life operations up by 22% to £132m
- Final dividend of 25p per share making a total of 37.5p per share for the year — up 9.5%

General Accident plc

THE ABOVE INFORMATION IS DERIVED FROM THE 1997 AND 1996 AUDITED ACCOUNTS.
General Accident plc, Pitheavlis, Perth, Scotland PH2 0NH Tel: 01738 623202

Bulmer shares in freefall as cheap beer dents profits

By Dominic Walsh

SHARES in HP Bulmer went into freefall yesterday as the cidermaker warned the market that a slump in Christmas trading meant full-year profits would be around 25 per cent lower than last year.

Its share price, already hit by the recent woes of its main rivals, Merrydown and Matthew Clark, nosedived from 406p to 295p in early trading, although it later recovered some of the lost ground to close at 310p. A year ago the shares traded at 626p.

A rather shell-shocked John Rudgard, who is stepping down as chief executive in April after 33 years with Bulmer, said the problems related to the off-trade. The multiple grocers, along with cash-and-carry outlets, had taken advantage of cheap foreign beer imports to sell lager at the equivalent of 80p a litre compared with a promotional price of £1.30 a litre for Bulmer's Strongbow

cider. "This is the first time in my experience that beer has been cheaper than cider at Christmas," he said. A subsequent price cut had boosted volumes, but it also served to cannibalise sales from its higher-margin products.

To compound the situation, the company had suffered at the hands of an "overzealous" salesman. "We set up a promotion with one customer to sell 10,000 cases. The customer then decided to place an order for nine times that amount, so the cost of the promotion to us was nine times what it should have been. The account manager should have raised the red flag at that point, but we've now put a new procedure in place to ensure it doesn't happen again."

The other problem area was the white cider category, which has already suffered from the higher duty imposed in 1996 on premium-strength ciders. In the

nine months to the January 31, volumes of White Lightning were down 13 per cent in a market up by 20 per cent after Bulmer attempted to raise its prices while most competitors were lowering theirs. It has responded by cutting the price and it will phase out its 5.4 per cent White Lightning brand in favour of its lower-duty 7.4 per cent cider.

Mr Rudgard said that the problems highlighted in yesterday's trading update were "largely transitory in nature" and the board remains convinced of its strategy. It will spend next week talking to analysts and institutional investors in an attempt to allay their fears.

Overall, Bulmer lifted volumes by 1.8 per cent during 1997 against the backdrop of a 5.6 per cent decline for the market as a whole. The final dividend will be at least maintained at last year's 9.62p.



Stefan Kay, chief executive, revealed an upturn in profits at paper and packaging producer Inveresk

Inveresk races to 109% increase

INVERESK, the paper and packaging group, showed an encouraging regeneration of pre-tax profits for the year ended November 29 with a 109 per cent increase on 1996 to £5.2 million. Sales volume increased by 4.3 per cent.

but turnover fell from £146 million to £131 million. Earnings per share rose 109 per cent to 7p out of which a total unchanged dividend of 5.79p will be paid. The final dividend was maintained at 3.56p.

Stefan Kay, chief executive, said that stability of prices had improved since 1996, but they were still below the long-term average. Despite over-capacity, adverse foreign exchange conditions and the economic instability of Asia, Inveresk expects continued progress.

Shanks to be No 2 in Belgium

By Adam Jones

SHANKS & McEWAN is paying £67.2 million to become the number two in the Belgian waste management market. The deal will be partly financed by a rights issue that will raise up to £24 million.

Shanks is buying four companies - Groupe Page, Sobry, Fusiman and Vanoppenolle, all of which are currently or partly owned by SITA, a subsidiary of Lyonnaise des Eaux. The businesses are being sold to satisfy European competition authorities after Lyonnaise des Eaux announced a merger with Compagnie de Suez.

Michael Averill, chief executive of Shanks & McEwan, said the companies made a combined profit before tax and interest of about £8.1 million last year, on a turnover of about £55 million.

He said the deal would be earnings enhancing in Shanks' 1998/1999 accounting year, assuming Belgian competition authorities approve the deal.

Vardon to spend £125m on core visitor attractions

By Martin Barrow

VARDON, the London Dungeon and Sea Life Centres leisure operator, is to invest up to £125 million in its core visitor attractions and health clubs over the next three years.

Vardon will spend £100 million on its Metropolitan and Civic health and fitness centres, with the balance to be spent on the London and York Dungeons and the Sea Life chain. Vardon also plans to open five new attractions in northern Europe in 1999 and 2000.

Funds for the investment will come principally from disposals, with a further £38.2 million raised yesterday through the sale of Parkdean Holidays, the self-catering holiday park business, to Rank Group.

Parkdean operates 10 parks in Scotland, East Anglia and Dorset. In 1997 the business earned trading profits of £3.4

million on turnover of £21.4 million. The parks will be rebranded and integrated with Haven, Rank's existing holiday park business, which already has 51 parks in England and Wales.

Vardon, which raised £30.5 million with the sale of its bingo division to a management team in November, yesterday reported a rise in profits to £16 million from £11.6 million before tax and exceptional items in 1997. Normalised earnings rose to 9p a share from 7.6p. The total dividend is increased to 2.4p a share from 1.9p, with a 1.6p final. The shares rose 12 1/2 p to 171 1/2 p yesterday, a new high.

David Hudd is to step down as executive chairman following the refocusing of the company. Nick Irens, currently chief executive, will become chairman at the company's next annual meeting.

Fujitsu to create 150 jobs

By Our Industrial Staff

FUJITSU, the Japanese company, is setting up a new telecommunications software development centre in Belfast, creating 150 jobs. The £5.4 million investment is the company's fourth in Northern Ireland in the past five years, bringing its total investment to almost £20 million.

Adam Ingram, Ulster economy minister, said: "Fujitsu's choice of Belfast for such an important investment enhances Northern Ireland's reputation as a rapidly developing world-class centre of excellence in telecommunications and IT."

The jobs, in research and development, will build up over five years. The company said it invested in Northern Ireland again because of the success of its existing operations and the reputation of the region's universities.

The company received more than £2 million in government aid for the centre, which will help to develop software for European and global markets.

Shipyard workers end dispute

By Our Industrial Staff

MORE THAN 600 sacked shipyard workers will return to work today after resolving a five-day pay dispute.

The workers from Aker McNulty offshore yard in South Shields, Tyne and Wear, voted to end the dispute at a ballot yesterday morning.

The men were sacked from the yard on Friday after turning down an 8.6 per cent pay offer and threatening a series of unofficial strikes.

At yesterday's ballot members of the GMB union voted 390 to 260 for a return to work. Many of the workers say the dispute was not about the offer but about the right to negotiate their own pay deal.

At a news conference held at the yard the management and GMB issued a joint statement.

It said: "Aker McNulty and GMB are happy that the matter is now resolved and can concentrate on working together as partners in order to achieve our joint objectives of long-term stability and prosperity for the company and workforce."

AMP rises 25% while preparing to float

By Our City Staff

AUSTRALIA'S largest fund manager and insurer, Australian Mutual Provident Society (AMP), laid the foundation yesterday for its A\$11 billion (£4.4 billion) stock market listing by unveiling a 25 per cent jump in annual profit.


AMP's net profit before abnormal rose to A\$2 billion in calendar 1997 from A\$1.6 billion in 1996, largely because, it said, results improved at its Australian retail business and Pearl, its British insurer.

AMP recorded abnormal costs of A\$233 million, comprising A\$78 million in deferred tax expenses, A\$75 million from a debt restructure in Brit-

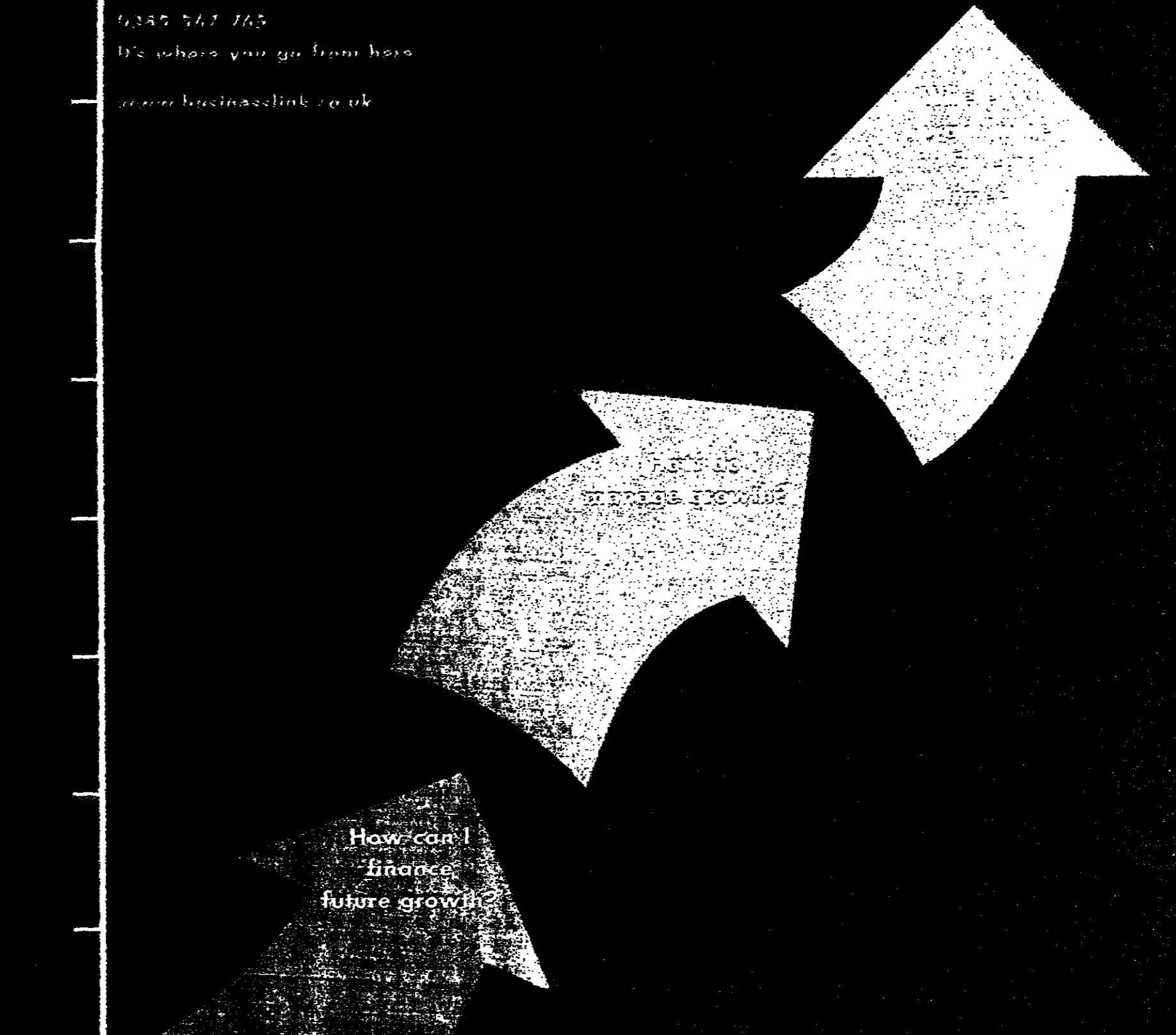
ain and A\$80 million in costs linked to the listing. Net profit after abnormal fell to about A\$1.8 billion from A\$2.1 billion a year earlier, when it was lifted by a one-off payment of A\$479 million from Pearl.

Revenue rose 29 per cent to A\$20.7 billion for the year, while assets under management jumped A\$27 billion to A\$122 billion. AMP said its recently announced £382 million takeover of Henderson, the British fund manager, would increase assets under management to A\$157 billion.

AMP is expected to issue its prospectus in March before an early June listing.



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THE TIMES UNIT TRUST INFORMATION SERVICE

Table containing financial data for various unit trusts, including columns for fund names, share prices, and performance metrics.

Table containing financial data for various unit trusts, including columns for fund names, share prices, and performance metrics.

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1997/98 High	Low	Company	Price	% Chg	P/E
ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
BANKS					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
BREWRIES, PUBS & REST.					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
FOOD MANUFACTURERS					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
ENGINEERING, VEHICLES					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
HOUSEHOLD GDS & TEXT					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
CONSTRUCTION					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
INSURANCE					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
DISTRIBUTORS					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2

1997/98 High	Low	Company	Price	% Chg	P/E
INVESTMENT TRUSTS					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
ENGINEERING, VEHICLES					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
FOOD MANUFACTURERS					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
HOUSEHOLD GDS & TEXT					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
CONSTRUCTION					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
INSURANCE					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2

1997/98 High	Low	Company	Price	% Chg	P/E
OTHER FINANCIAL					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
MEDIA					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
PHARMACEUTICALS					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
PRINTING & PAPER					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
PROPERTY					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2

1997/98 High	Low	Company	Price	% Chg	P/E
RETAILERS, GENERAL					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
RETAILERS, FOOD					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
WATER					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
ALTERNATIVE INV MARKET					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2

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1997/98 High	Low	Company	Price	% Chg	P/E
BRITISH FUNDS					
SHORTS (under 5 years)					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
LONGS (over 15 years)					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
UNLISTED					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2
INDEX-LINKED (on projected basis)					
157.4	157.4	Asahi Breweries Ltd	157.4	0	15.2

From Saturday, one of London's most charming galleries will be back in business. Richard Cork reports



Getting ready for the big day: part of the exhibition of works by the iconoclastic and outrageous Piero Manzoni with which the Serpentine Gallery is relaunching itself back on to the London arts scene

Serpentine's grand re-opening

Just over four years ago Iain Sproat, the junior minister at the National Heritage Department, threatened to raze the Serpentine Gallery and replace it with facilities for horse-riding. It was a dark moment for the Serpentine's enterprising director, Julia Peyton-Jones, struggling to raise funds for a major renovation of her increasingly decrepit domain.

But the former Kensington Gardens tea-house has lasted longer than the Tory Government. After raising £1 million itself, the Serpentine was granted £3 million from the National Lottery. And on Saturday the pristine new Serpentine will reopen its doors.

The outcome is a delight. Anyone worried that this state-of-the-art gallery might lose its special identity will feel instantly reassured. The character of J.G. West's original 1934 building has been preserved and the exterior looks virtually unchanged. The entrance, though, is new, a cool white chamber on the south side where a ramshackle lumber room once lurked. But John Miller and Partners, the designers, have ensured that its light, airy minimalism is thoroughly in tune with the exhibition rooms beyond.

Space flows more freely between the rooms, allowing us to move with far greater ease from one to another. The

South Gallery, always the least satisfactory for display purposes, has become more coherent. Like the other rooms, it boasts a splendid grey slate floor close in tone and texture to the original. At east and west, it leads through ample, unfussy rectangular doorways to long galleries where the old window ranges have been retained. So the delectable views outwards play just as refreshment a role as ever in our enjoyment of the work on show.

The old window-panes have been replaced by double-glazed alternatives, ideal for the sophisticated air-conditioning system which maintains the Serpentine's temperature at an equitable level. It used to be a glacial place in winter. The roofs leaked, staining the ceilings and threatening the safety of the exhibits. Now the white-painted surfaces are all immaculate, and they contain lighting far more discreet and flexible than before. At night, metal grids stretch across the windows to offer, at last, the kind of security this isolated, vulnerable building lacked.

The main loss in terms of window light occurs on the north side. Here the central gallery has been blocked off from the glass-paned doors which used to be the Serpentine's main entrance. But this remodelled room is

subtly proportioned and the extra wall enables it to display a significantly greater amount of work. Looking up, we can appreciate here just how much the old premises have gained from their face-lift. For the clean geometry of the great circular dome in the centre now emerges with astonishing, streamlined clarity, further enhanced by a sparkling ring of new lights set like stars into the curved ceiling.

Better still, the space between the new gallery wall and the north windows has

undergone a transformation. Renamed the Sackler Centre for Arts Education, it provides a wonderfully welcoming space for visitors who want to study, discuss or make images of their own in response to the exhibitions. Schoolchildren in particular will relish the unique appeal of a room overlooking such an enticing landscape. Always lively, the Serpentine's education initiatives will receive a much-deserved boost in this new space. Whether housing the Saturday art club run by

artists for young people, or the summer school for sixth-form students, the Sackler Centre is bound to play a vital role.

For her re-opening show, Peyton-Jones has decided to mount a retrospective of an Italian artist who died, far too young, 35 years ago. The provocative and prescient nature of Piero Manzoni's work means, however, that this is no pious historical exercise. Throughout all the diverse experiments made during his brief yet prolific career, he maintained an open attitude

bracingly similar to the approach favoured by so many young artists today.

That is why his work still looks fresh and contemporary in Germano Celant's lucid selection. Far from feeling shackled by the awesome legacy of Italian art from the past, Manzoni broke down barriers with impish zest. He saw the fascination in materials which most artists of the period would have regarded as too lowly or banal. In this respect, he was indebted to the challenge posed before the First World War by the arch-heretic Marcel Duchamp, who purchased ready-made objects and displayed them as legitimate art-works.

Manzoni thrived on provocation, and earned lasting notoriety by placing his own excrement in small metal cans labelled *merda d'artista*. He even posed for a photograph, can in hand, next to a lavatory bowl. His eyes gleam in brazen defiance of all those who dismissed him as a charlatan.

It would be a pity, though, if his scatological side of his work drew too much attention away from the rest of his output. The truth is that most of the Serpentine exhibits possess an unexpected sense of quiet, contemplative purity. Manzoni often impregnated canvases with kaolin, cutting them into squares or folding them in horizontal creases that stretch across the full width of a picture. Obsessively white, they have a melancholy aura and resemble expanses of cold, wind-ruffled sea.

Manzoni called them *Achromes*, and they are the most seductive works he ever produced. They have a purged lyricism, prophetic of later developments in art and clearly the product of an artist who knew how to deploy the most rigorous restraint. The reborn Serpentine is right to ally itself with such a generous, all-encompassing vision.

● Piero Manzoni at the Serpentine Gallery, London W2 (0171-402 6075), until April 26



Outwardly the same, the Serpentine has been substantially refurbished inside

Carry on stripping

THE FULL MONTY
Fox Home Entertainment, 15, 1997
DOES anyone need reminding that it's about six out-of-work steelworkers who plan to emulate the Chippendales and perform a strip act at the local club? In olden days, this would have been a cheap and bawdy British comedy; now it comes served with a touch of class and social comment, as well as Robert Carlyle, Tom Wilkinson and Mark Addy.

SPEED 2
Fox Pathé, PG, 15, 1997
SANDRA BULLOCK was looking forward to six lazy days on a cruise liner with Jason Patric, a SWAT team member with marriage on his mind. Now she must show spunk and muscle as she battles Willem Dafoe's hijacker, rescues a deaf girl

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trapped in a lift, rides jet skis and gets taken hostage. The plot appears xeroxed from other movies; luckily, a spectacular, wreck-age-strewn climax just about saves the day. A rental release.

THE DARK MIRROR
Second Sight, PG, 1946
"I DON'T mind ordinary music — it's the wonderful stuff I don't like." Such lines remind us we're in the presence of a master screenwriter, Nunnally Johnson, who keeps this improbable thriller spirited and witty. Olivia de Havilland fires on all cylinders as two twin sisters, one normal and one up the wall, and both suspected of murder; while enigmatised director Robert Siodmak revels in the characters' psychological turmoil.

PALOOKAVILLE
Fox Pathé, 15, 1996
NOT another low-budget American crime film? But this delicious first feature from director Alan Taylor offers something different: real characters, lots of heart, little violence. David Epstein's script follows the fortunes of three jobless chums in New Jersey, struggling to become hoodlums. Taylor pitches his film as a realistic piece with fairy-tale trimmings. Available to rent.

STROMBOLI
Second Sight, 15, 1949
"RAGING Island... Raging Passions! This is it!" declared the luscious advertisement for the film's initial release, completely out of key with the documentary tone Roberto Rossellini strove hard to achieve. Ingrid Bergman plays a refugee escaping from an internment camp by starting an unhappy new life with an Italian fisherman. The film's acute eye for nature in the raw easily compensates for the plot's simplicities.

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- Anthony Quinn, MAIL ON SUNDAY

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SPORT IN BRIEF

Australian cleared to join Saints

RUGBY LEAGUE: St Helens have been given clearance to sign the controversial Sydney St George centre, Damien Smith. He is due to arrive next week after being granted a work permit yesterday, but will not be able to make his debut until St Helens' first Super League game, at Salford Reds on April 5.

UWIC's revenge RUGBY LEAGUE: UWIC gained revenge for their semi-final defeat by their Lehighborough in the British Universities Sports Association championship last season by trouncing the 25-times champions 43-0 in the quarter-final at Cyncoed yesterday. However, the Cardiff side, which last month reached the final of The Times Students European Rugby Championship, lost its promising wing, Andrew Wagstaff, who dislocated his kneecap after scoring a try. Swansea joined UWIC in the last four after a comfortable 28-3 win over Newcastle.

Trinity first ROWING: 1st & 3rd Trinity moved into top place after they downed Downing at the Railings in the Cambridge University Lent races yesterday. Lady Margaret moved up after catching Trinity Hall five strokes short of Morley's Holt. In the women's section, Queen's moved into the challengers' position when they toppled Trinity Hall two strokes short of the Railway Bridge.

Drugs warning SWIMMING: The sport's world governing body, FINA, will hold a special meeting to discuss tougher anti-drug measures after its doping taskforce meets in Lausanne next week.

Oakes goes from strength to strength



Oakes has given the shot her all during an international career spanning 22 years

David Powell in Valencia on the enduring love of a Briton for the shot

British sport ought to love Judy Oakes — winner, campaigner, institution — yet somehow her plaudits have never equalled her worth. It is hard to think of a sportsman in Britain who has been more undervalued than Oakes, given what she has achieved, but her spirit remains alive, her ambition still burns, never mind that she has just passed her 40th birthday. She celebrated it on Valentine's Day, a quiet evening at home with her family, though she has neither a husband nor children, and was nobody's Valentine. "I do not really have time for making relationships, so it has taken a back seat," Oakes said. "But you never know..." Perhaps, when her marriage to the shot is dissolved.

wealth shot gold medals but can claim three. Gael Martin, the Australian who left Oakes with the silver in 1986, admitted to a federal inquiry into drug abuse that she had taken performance enhancers throughout her career. However, the official Oakes count remains two gold, two silver, one bronze, though she deserves a medal for her campaign for justice. Instead of concentrating on how wonderful it felt to regain her title in 1994, she used her press conference to dwell on Prince Edward, the president of the Commonwealth Games Federation.

Prospects of gold rush draw elite to the Gulf

FROM JOHN HOPKINS, GOLF CORRESPONDENT, IN DUBAI

DUBAI, the city of gold, will attract thousands of people for a shopping festival that starts next month. For now, three of the world's best golfers, Greg Norman, Ernie Els and Colin Montgomerie, are here in the Gulf, attracted in part by the lure of sheikh's money. The prize-money, totalling nearly £800,000, is only the half of it. For Norman, who is competing in his second successive event on the PGA European Tour, and Montgomerie, who is beginning his 1998 campaign on his home turf, business is the other half. Both have been commissioned to design courses for a \$153 million residential community being developed at the Emirates Golf Club, where the Desert Classic starts this morning.

In January, Ballesteros underwent a successful 20-minute operation to remove a growth on his left eye. In this he joined Philip Parkin, the former player who is now a television commentator, who believes that, after nearly 15 years of trouble with his eyes, he has been cured by doctors at a hospital in the United States and might be able to resume his professional career. "The trouble began in 1984. My left eye was eight degrees out of true," Parkin said. "In the morning I could look at a slope on a green and say it went one way and in the afternoon I would think it sloped the other." He is now visiting eye specialists in 1988.



Els: record-holder

It is a safe bet that Els, Severiano Ballesteros, Ian Woosnam and José María Olazábal, to mention only those who have won major championships, have also been offered incentives to appear. At this time of the year, Dubai is beautiful and this golf course is in magnificent condition, its greens as fast as Augusta's. The temperature is in the high 70s, the air dry and a little, freshening wind comes in from the desert. Wherever one looks, another hotel is under construction. When many of the golfers arrived at their hotel on the edge of the sea, the sign over the newly-opened hotel read ch. By the second day, that had extended to Beach Hotel. Perhaps it will be able to glory in its full title — the Oasis Beach Hotel — by the end of the tournament. The elite starts as one of the favourites. He is the course record-holder after his remarkable 61, during which he had 15 single putts in 1994, and in a rare vein of form so far this year. Of the four events in which he has won one, twice finished second and came third in the fourth.

By 1991 he was having such difficulty with his sight that his golf was poor and he lost his player's card in 1991. He even had an operation on his eyes performed aboard a floating hospital ship off Dubai. Nothing worked. Not until he went to the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore in January, 1997, was real progress made. "I went to see one specialist and quite quickly he called in two of his colleagues. On January 29 last year I had an operation and they told me it would be up to one year before the muscles settled. Three weeks ago I went back and was given the all-clear, so I am starting to practise again."

FOR THE RECORD

Table with multiple columns containing sports records and results under various categories like Athletics, Rugby Union, Squash, Tennis, Basketball, Cricket, Hockey, Rowing, and Snow Reports.

SQUASH

Britons join field in pursuit of top title BY COLIN MCQUILLAN IT IS an ill wind that blows nobody any good and while Jonathon Power, of Canada, and Ahmed Barada, of Egypt, will be carrying their luck on the eve of the Equitable Life Super Series finals, which begin in Hatfield today, their misfortune has offered a boost to British hopes of success in the event.

Peter Nicol, of Scotland, the world No. 1, Alex Gough, the Wales No. 1, and Mark Chaloner, of Lincolnshire, were already assured of their places at the finals because of their success in the eight events selected as qualifiers from the Professional Squash Association World Tour. So, too, were Power and Barada, but injury and flu, respectively, have forced them to pull out, giving Del Harris and Simon Parke, both from England, the chance to take part. The first two days at Hatfield are round-robin qualifiers in two groups, leading to semi-finals on Saturday and the final and place play-offs on Sunday. Nicol opens the Harrow group against Anthony Hill of Australia, with Parke then taking on Rodney Eyles, the world champion, also from Australia. In the Fleet group, Jansher Khan, of Pakistan, defending the title, meets Chaloner and Gough takes on Harris in the last match of the day. Parke's chance offered encouragement to ICL Lion-Herts, who moved off the bottom of the National Super League with a 3-0 defeat of Rowlands Manchester. Parke, the British champion, beat Derek Ryan, the Irish champion, 9-6, 7-9, 7-9, 9-2, 9-2 and, with Harris recovering from a wrist fracture, Chris Walker, the England captain, and Rodney Durbach, of South Africa, added victories of their own. The win lifted Lion-Herts, the defending champions, into fourth place in the table.

SHEEHAN on BRIDGE

BY ROBERT SHEEHAN, BRIDGE CORRESPONDENT This was an exciting hand from the TGR high game. Dealer East North-South game Rubber bridge

Bridge hand diagram showing a deal with cards and a table of scores for various hands.

With no one having much idea of what his partner had, the bidding as far as Six Hearts seems reasonable. Notice East's bid of Five Spades. This particular East hand is an exception to the general rule that when you have preempted you should leave subsequent decisions to your partner: it is not clear to open Three Spades, but I think that having done so East (Gunnar Hallberg, Swedish international) was correct to go Five Spades — after all, he did have a most unusual hand-type for a preempt. Both Six Spades and Seven Hearts look unseemly. East doubled Seven Hearts to warn his partner not to sacrifice. Now South (the fearless proprietor) came up with a really good bid — he could judge that East's double must show an ace, so he hoped by switching to Seven No-Trumps he would give West a lead problem. So indeed he did. The pitiful spade lead was the only lead to give the declarer a chance. Do you think he should have made the contract? I think so — a disciplined player like Hallberg was bound to be two-sighted to bid Five Spades over Five Hearts. With a side suit of Queen diamonds he would be less inclined to bid than with a club suit of AQ109; thus I think it is clear for declarer to win the first spade and finesse the ten of diamonds. That way he makes 13 tricks. In practice he took all the hearts, and eventually lost the thirteenth trick to West's queen of diamonds. Robert Sheehan writes on bridge Monday to Friday in Sport and in the Weekend section on Saturday.

WORD-WATCHING

- FASTIGIUM a. Weariness b. The ridge of a house c. A Roman magistrate GLABELLA a. A wooden spoon b. Eyebrow space c. A gladiator's net GORGET a. A wimple b. A wrinkle c. A wrinkle

KEENE on CHESS

BY RAYMOND KEENE CHESS CORRESPONDENT Diagram of final position

Chessboard diagram showing a final position with pieces and a list of moves.

White: Alexei Shirov Black: Veselin Topalov Linars 1998

Chessboard diagram showing a Sicilian Defence position with a list of moves.

White to play. This position is from the game Palac Baumegger, Montecatini 1997. The black king's castled position appears reasonably secure but this is not the case. Can you see why? Solution on page 45

SPORTS

Sport must not drink from drug-poisoned chalice

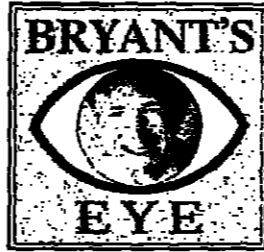


Paish argued against the banning of drugs

For some people it's not enough to live for sport, they have to die for it, too. In America, had a lot to live for. She represented Great Britain at the triathlon and took to body-building and strength contests. She was recently voted "second strongest woman in the world". Today she is dead. She was 23. It is too early to be sure what killed her, though there is plenty of speculation. She spent her last night this week with her husband, Steve Winter (they met at a strong-man contest), at the home of a friend, Graham Black. Black, a bodybuilder, a former Mr Europe and runner-up at Mr Universe, was arrested last November after police allegedly seized £3,500 worth of steroids at his home. He is reported to have said at the time: "Everyone uses steroids at top levels. I wouldn't have a hope in hell without them." There are sadly plenty of people in sport who echo such views and, increasingly, they

believe that the war against drugs is being so badly lost that the best thing we can do is to accept defeat and give way to drug-taking. Prominent among them this week was one of Britain's most experienced athletics coaches, Wilf Paish. Speaking on the BBC television programme, *Heart of the Matter*, he scoffed at the existing drug-testing set-up as a waste of time. "We should see drug-taking as an acceptable way of enhancing performance in sport," he said. "The rules simply do not work and should be scrapped." Paish, who coaches at the moment in South Africa, is by no means alone. Dr John Hawley, director of the High Performance laboratory at the South African Sports Science Institute in Cape Town, said after the Atlanta Olympic Games that drugs should be legalised to create a level playing-field. "Whenever anyone stands up there on the podium, I don't know whether it's them or the drugs," Hawley said. "Maybe we should just make steroids legal. As unethical and as morally wrong as it sounds, I actually think that's the way to go." This debate goes back as long as doping itself in sport. Competitors in the ancient Olympics used to hype-up on strychnine-laced alcohol or magic mushroom potions. In 1886 a French cyclist was the first known case of an athlete dying from a performance enhancer called speedballs — a cocktail of cocaine and heroin. The first synthetic anabolic steroid was developed in 1953

Why barriers against using substances that enhance performance should remain firmly in place



and, as new variants of steroids and amphetamines were developed, they were rapidly assimilated into the world of sport. The champions of drug use argue that it is the right of the individual to choose whatever they wish to eat, drink, inhale or inject and that, even if there are adverse consequences, the individual should be free to choose. Their opponents argue that the use of drugs prevents fair play and equality among

contestants and is also a health danger to those who take them. Coaches such as Paish sweep aside such arguments, claiming that since the athletes will take them anyway, it is safer to have the drugs given by doctors. "Even the infamous steroids have been shown to be safe when taken on their own and under supervision," he said. But the argument that everything will be fine once the doctors take control is rubbish. Hundreds of medical, along with coaches and officials, are now under investigation for one of the biggest pharmaceutical experiments in history — the systematic doping of thousands of athletes in the now-defunct communist East Germany. Secret Stasi files show clearly that the state-sponsored drug programme was meticu-

lously monitored by medical experts. But these did not prevent many of the athletes paying a terrible price for their treatment. As a result of potent anabolic steroid cocktails, some of the men developed breasts and lost their libidos, while women grew facial hair, acquired deep voices and suffered gynaecological complaints and infertility. One of the most dramatic cases involves Heidi Kreiger, authorised to administer drugs in more moderate and "safe" dosages, there will always be athletes who think that more is better and who are prepared to win at any cost. It may sound plausible for coaches like Paish to argue that a few sporting millionaires at the top are professional entertainers who have the right to pump what they like into their bodies, but for millions sport is about recreation, not self-destruction. If a record-breaking performance is about anything it is about giving us a glimpse of human potential — an idea of what the body is capable of when fit, healthy and fine-tuned by exercise. If in the pursuit of enhancing performance we destroy health rather than build it, if we shorten life rather than extend it, then we will have turned sport itself into the most sick and distorted monster of all.

JOHN BRYANT

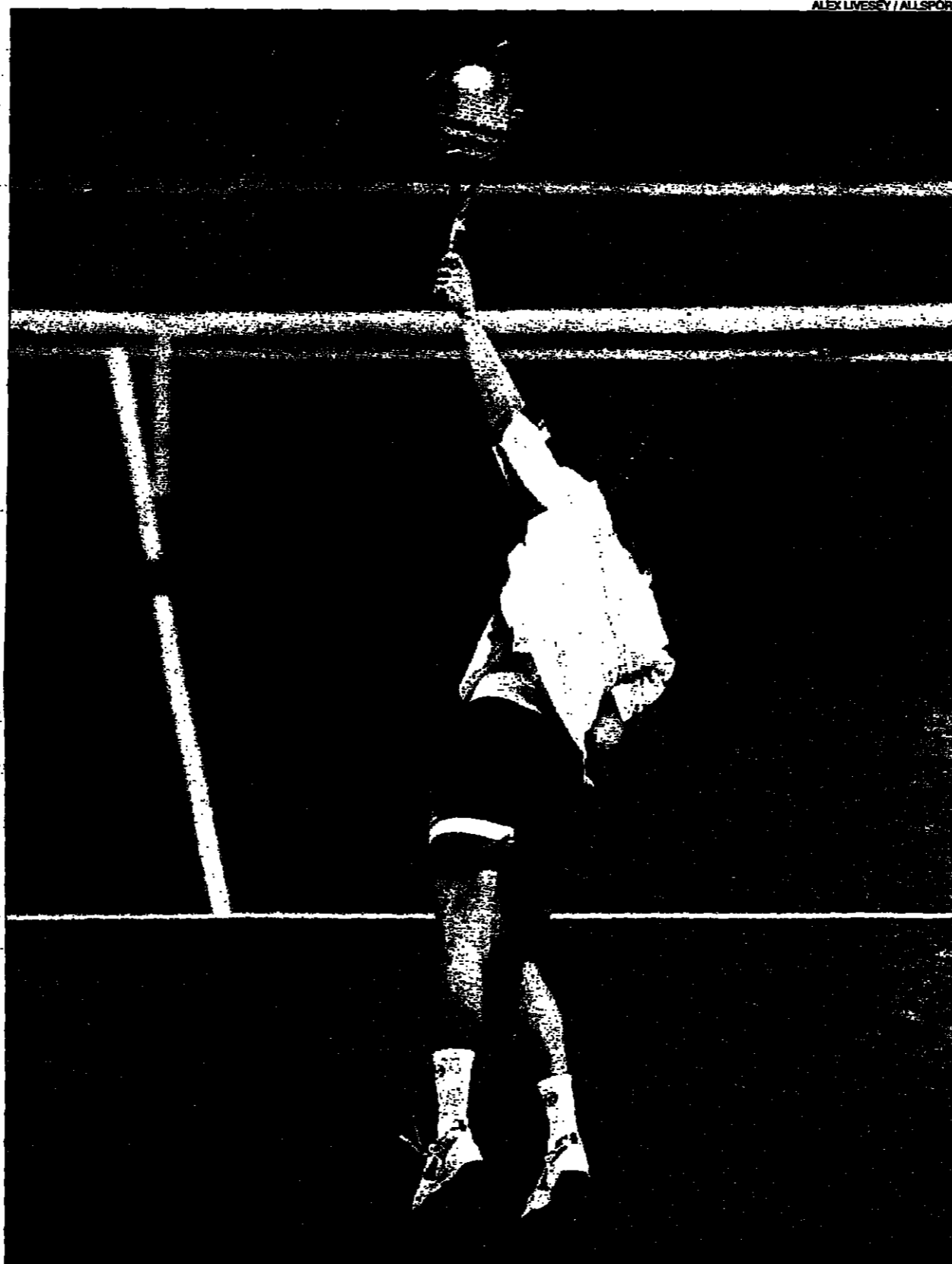
TENNIS Richardson remains upwardly mobile

BY JULIAN MUSCAT, TENNIS CORRESPONDENT

WHEN, like Andrew Richardson, the Great Britain No 3, you are trading on the fringes, you take your victories any way they come. Richardson was therefore unwilling to dwell on Marc Rosset's retirement from their first-round encounter in the Guardian Direct Cup at Battersea Park yesterday. The truth is that Richardson — as relieved to taste success as Tim Henman had been late on Tuesday night — was in control when Rosset, world ranked No 28, withdrew with a viral complaint. Having snared the opening set, the Briton, No 145 in the world, broke Rosset early in the second to prompt the latter's departure. "I thought I was playing well, whether he was ill or not," Richardson said

Results 42

after registering his fifth victory on the ATP Tour. This triumph, coupled with Richardson's promising showing in Challenger events this year, ensures that his gradual ascent of the rankings will be maintained. What he must now achieve is the requisite consistency for a place among the top 100. "These days I go onto the court with a bit of confidence, whoever I'm playing," he said. "On a good day I'm definitely a top 100 player but on a bad one I'm 200 or 250. The key is to get the most out of yourself when you are not 100 per cent. It's a mental thing and I must work on it." Richardson, 23, who continues to make minor gains without threatening the quantum leap, has his sights on the winner of the match last night between Greg Rusedski and Marc-Kevin Goellner. Meanwhile, if Henman can overcome Rainer Schuttler, whom he plays today, he will face Yevgeny Kafelnikov in the third round, the Russian



Stretching a point: Ivanisevic threw himself into a service during his defeat by Ferreira at Battersea Park yesterday

"It just shows what matches can turn on," Henman said. "If I had lost that match, what could I have said? The crowd really helped me in a similar way to Wimbledon." It was, of course, at Wimbledon, eight months ago, that Henman ended Krajiček's reign as champion after an equally absorbing encounter. The two are so closely matched that they have disputed five tie-breaks in the seven sets they have played to date. Krajiček was at the height of his powers in advance of this tournament. The winner in St Petersburg on his last outing, he was anxious to progress because of the imminent birth of his first child, when he plans to take time away from the circuit. "I think he was playing as well as he can play," Henman said. "I felt a bit sorry for him because the crowd definitely put some pressure on him. They could sense when I had an opportunity." The pity was that the match was scheduled so late in the day. Some 2,200 watched the opening shots but barely half that number were on hand to see Henman strike the winning blow at 15 minutes past midnight. Quite why such an intriguing encounter between two popular players did not start earlier is hard to fathom. The outcome also stifled the growing chorus for the head of Henman's coach, David Felgate. In this respect, Henman hit the nail on the head when he said: "My beating Krajiček was not all to do with David, just as when I've been losing, it's not all down to him. It was me who had to win the match, just as it was me who has been playing like an idiot in the previous four weeks."

Answers from page 42

- FASTIGIUM**
(b) The apex or summit. In architecture, the ridge of a house. Also, the gable end (of a roof), a pediment. The Latin word for apex or summit. "I have now arrived to the fastigium, the very highest point of this Mountain."
- GALLIAMBIC**
(c) The epithet of a lyric metre (founded on the Ionic) a minore tetrameter catenaria, with anacrusis, supposed to have been used by the priests of the Phrygian Cybele in their songs. "A song of the Galli or priests of Cybele." "There were at that time no English galliambics. But Mr. Tempsy has since written them [in *Bodicea*] with great power."
- GLABELLA**
(b) In anatomy, the small space in the human forehead between the eyebrows and immediately above a line from one to the other. Diminutive of the Latin *glaber* smooth. "The nasal depression is very slight, the glabella prominent, but the superciliary ridges, little developed."
- GORGET**
(a) An article of female dress, covering the neck and breast, a wimple. Originally a piece of armour for the throat. From the Old French *gorgete* a collar, gorget the throat. Walter Scott, *Woodstock*, 1826: "With these grave senators sat their goodly dames in ruff and gorget."
- SOLETRON TO WINNING CHESS MOVE**
1 Rg7+1 Kg7 2 Rg1- Kh8 3 Qf6 checkmate

SAILING: BRITISH SKIPPER HEADS HOME LEAVING CREW TO FINISH LEG

Smith justifies abandoning ship

LAWRIE SMITH, the skipper of the dismasted Whitbread Round the World Race yacht, *Silk Cut*, yesterday defended his decision to return to England, leaving half his crew to motor up the South American coast and the others working here preparing for her arrival.

Smith's absence has been the source of adverse comment among some race officials, who believe that the skipper should be with his crew helping to sort out *Silk Cut's* many problems. Smith got off the boat when she made her first landfall at Ushuaia, in southern Argentina, last weekend and is not expected back until next week. Speaking from Southampton, he said that it had always been his plan to come home after this leg to be with his family and to have meetings with leading figures in the

RUGBY UNION

Wales retreat to lick wounds and reconsider

BY DAVID HANDS, RUGBY CORRESPONDENT

WALES, the wounds of last Saturday's 34-point defeat by England still smarting, went behind closed doors for squad training in Cardiff yesterday. Selection of the XV to play Scotland at Wembley on March 7 has been postponed until next Tuesday, which gives players whose places may be in doubt the chance to shine in Saturday's cup ties in Wales and England. In addition, Clive Griffiths, the director of rugby at London Welsh, was invited to help with the back division. Griffiths prepared the Wales team for the rugby league World Cup two years ago. Ireland, still coming to terms with the departure of Brian Ashton as national coach, expect to name the first panel of their new management today. Warren Gatland, the Connacht director of rugby, who will act as caretaker until the end of the Five Nations Championship, will formulate squads for the senior and A fixtures with France next week, though the starting XV's will not be confirmed until next week. Ashton's resignation on Tuesday has led to speculation that he could return to English rugby with Leicester, who dismissed Bob Dwyer as their director of rugby last week, but Leicester have confirmed John Wells and Joel Stransky to take them forward for the remainder of this season, though Peter Wheeler, their chief executive, did not rule out talks with Ashton. "We have the expectation that Wells and Stransky will make a very strong case to continue," Wheeler said. "I don't think many people would bet against that, given the characters and personalities involved." Stransky, the former South Africa fly half, had tentatively discussed coaching even before Dwyer's departure and Wheeler dismissed suggestions that his new management team lacked experience. Dan Lyle, who helped Bath to win the Heineken Cup last month, has returned to the United States for an operation on damaged cruciate knee ligaments. The No 8 is unlikely to play again this season, adding to Bath's back-row concerns, since Richard Webster and Nathan Thomas are also injured. Phil Vickery, the Gloucester prop suspended for 30 days at the weekend for punching during his debut for England against Wales, will know today whether he must serve out the ban. The Five Nations Committee will deliver its verdict on his appeal this morning.

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